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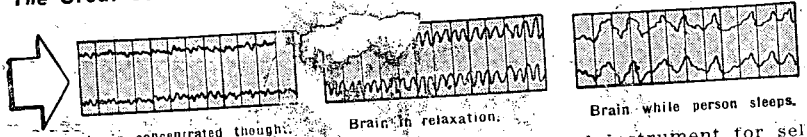

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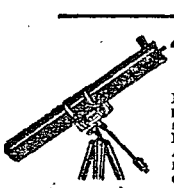

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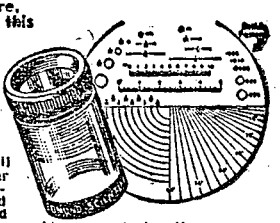

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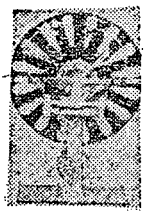

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SCIENCE FICTION
STORIES

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Volume 8
Number 4
January, 1958

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Editor: ROBERT A. W. LOWNDES MARIE A. PARK, Asso. Ed.
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Author, Author!

TOM GODWIN will probably be associated for years to come with a fine story that John W. Campbell used for the purposes of illustrating his ideas of science fiction in an article he wrote for *Saturday Review,* in 1956. You remember "The Cold Equations", and we hope you'll remember, "The Wild Ones".

DICK HETSCHEL and NICHOLAS G. LORDI have one thing in common, besides their debut in SFS, this issue. Before we'd read their stories, we had never heard of them before. But I think we'll be hearing more from them.

DONALD FRANSON could be found in the "Science Discussions" departments of leading science fiction magazines, back in 1937. His last appearance with us was in a short story on language reform, called, "Comes The Revolution".

CALVIN M. KNOX is a great admirer of Robert Silverberg, and seems to follow Bob around in the magazines. Latest news is that Knox expects to follow Silverberg into the pocket-book novels market.

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PRIME COMMANDMENT

by Calvin M. Knox

illustration by FREAS

All laws ought to be obeyed; both parties agreed on that. But when obeying one would require violating the spirit of another, higher law, then the greater should rule the lesser. And both groups on this little world agreed here, too!

IF THE strangers had come to World on any night but The Night of No Moon, perhaps the tragedy could have been avoided. Even had the strangers come that night, if they had left their ship in a parking orbit, and landed on World by dropshaft, it might not have happened.

But the strangers arrived on World on The Night of No Moon, and they came by ship—a fine bright vessel a thousand feet long, with burnished gold walls. And because they were a proud and stiffnecked people, and because the people of World were what they were, The Night of No Moon was the prelude to a season of blood.

Down at The Ship, the wor-

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shipping was under way when the strangers arrived. The Ship sat embedded in the side of the hill, exactly where it had first fallen upon World; open in its side was the hatch through which the people of World had come forth.

THE BONFIRE blazed, casting bright shadows on the corroded, time-stained walls of The Ship. The worshipping was under way. Lyle of the Kwitni knelt in deep genuflection, forehead inches from the warm rich loam of World, muttering in a hoarse monotone the *Book of the Ship*. At his side stood the priestess, Jeen of the McCaig, arms flung wide, head thrown back, as she recited the *Litany of the Ship* in savage bursts of half-chanted song.

"In the beginning, there was the ship..."

"Kwitni was the Captain, McCaig the astrogator," came the droning antiphonal response of the congregation, all five hundred of the people of World, crouching in the praying-pit surrounding The Ship.

"And Kwitni and McCaig brought the people through the sky to World..."

"And they looked upon World and found it good," was the response.

"And down through the sky did the people come..."

"Down across the lightyears to World."

"Out of The Ship!"

"Out of The Ship!"

On it went, a long and ornate retelling of the early days of World, when Kwitni and McCaig, with the guidance of The Ship, had brought the original eight-and-thirty safely to ground. For three hundred years, the story had grown; six nights a year, there was no moon, and the ceremonial retelling took place. And five hundred and thirteen were the numbers of the people on this Night of No Moon when the strangers came.

JEEN OF the McCaig was the first to see them, as she stood before The Ship waiting for the ecstacy to sweep over her, and for her feet to begin the worship-dance. She was young, and this was only her forth worship; she waited with some impatience for the frenzy to seize her.

Suddenly a blaze of light appeared in the dark moonless sky. Jeen stared; in her twenty years she had never seen fire in the heavens on The Night of No Moon.

Her sharp eyes saw that the fire was coming closer, that something was dropping through the skies toward them, and a shiver ran down her back; she felt the coolness of the night winds against her lightly-clad body. She heard the people stirring uneasily behind her.

Perhaps it was a miracle, she thought; perhaps The

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Ship had sent some divine manifestation. Her heart pounded; her flanks glistened with sweat. The worshipping drew near its climax, and Jeen felt the dance-fever come over her, growing more intense as the strange light approached the ground.

She wriggled belly and buttocks sensuously and began the dance, the dance of worship that concluded the ceremony, while from behind her came the pleasure-sounds of the people as they, too, worshipped The Ship in their own ways. For the commandment of the old lawgiver Lorresson had been, *Be happy, my children,* and the people of World expressed their joy while the miracle-light plunged rapidly Worldward.

ELEVEN miles from the Hill of The Ship, the strange light finally touched ground—not a light at all, but a starship, golden-hulled, a thousand feet long and bearing within itself the eight hundred men and women of the Temple of the New Resurrection, who had crossed the gulf of light years in search of a world where they might practice their religion free from interference and without the distraction of the presence of countless billions of the unholy.

The Blessed Myron Brown was the leader of this flock and the captain of their ship, the *New Galilee.* Fifth in direct line from the Blessed Leroy Brown himself, Blessed Myron was majestic of bearing and thunderous of voice, and when his words rang out over the ship phones, saying, "Here may we rest and here may we live," the eight hundred members of the Temple of the New Resurrection rejoiced in their solemn way, and made ready for the landing.

They were not tractable people. The tenets of their church were two: that the Messiah had come again on Earth, died again, been reborn, and in His resurrection prophesied that the Millenium was at hand—and, secondly, that He had chosen certain people to lead the way in the forthcoming building of the New Jerusalem.

And it was through the mouth of the Blessed Leroy Brown that He spoke, in the two thousand nine hundred and seventieth year since His first birth; and the Blessed Leroy Brown did name those of Earth who had been chosen for holiness and salvation. Many of the elect declined the designation, some with kindly thanks, some with scorn. The Blessed Leroy Brown died early, the protomartyr of his Temple, but his work went on.

A HUNDRED years passed and the members of his

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Temple were eight hundred in number, proud salvation-touched men and women who denounced the sinful ways of the world and revealed that judgement was near. There were martyrs, and the way was a painful one for the Blessed. But they persevered, and they raised money (some of their members had been quite wealthy in their days of sin); and when it became clear that Earth was too steeped in infamy for them to abide existence any further on it, they built their ark, the *New Galilee*, and crossed the gulf of night to a new world where they might live in peace and happiness and never know the persecution of the mocking ones, as they did on Earth.

They were a proud and a stubborn people, and they kept the Ways as they knew them. They dressed in gray, for bright colors were sinful; they covered their bodies but for face and hands, and when a man knew his wife it was for the rearing of children alone. They made no graven images; they honered the sabbath; and it was their very great hope that on Beta Andromedae XII they could at last be at peace.

But fifteen minutes after their landing they knew this was not to be. For while the women labored to erect camp and the men hunted provisions, the Blessed Enoch Brown, son of the leader Myron, went forth in a helicopter to survey the new planet.

WHEN HE returned from his mission, his dour face was deeper than usual with woe; when he spoke, it was in a sepulchral tone. "The Lord has visited another tribulation upon us, even here in the wilderness."

"What have you seen?" the Blessed Myron asked.

"This world is peopled!"

"Impossible! We were given every assurance that this was a virgin world, without colonists, without native life."

"Nevertheless," the Blessed Enoch said bitterly, "There are people here. I have seen them. Naked savages who look like Earthpeople—dancing and prancing by the light of a huge bonfire round the rotting hulk of an abandoned spaceship that lies implanted in a hillside." He scowled. "I flew low over them. Their bodies were virtually bare, and their flesh was oiled, and they leaped wildly and coupled like animals in the open."

For a moment, the Blessed Myron Brown stared bleakly at his son, unable to speak. The blood drained from his lean face. When he finally spoke, his voice was thick with anger. "Even here the Devil pursues us."

"Who can these people be?"

The Blessed Myron shrugged. "It makes little difference. Perhaps they are de-

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sendants of a Terran colonial mission—a ship bound for a more distant world, that crashed here and sent no word to Earth." He stared heavenward for a moment, at the dark and moonless sky, and muttered a brief prayer. "Tomorrow," he said, "we will visit these people and speak with them. Now let us build our camp."

THE MORNING dawned fresh and clear, the sun rising early and growing warm rapidly; and shortly after morning prayer a picked band of eleven Resurrectionist men made their way through the heavily-wooded area that separated their camp and that of the savages. The women of the Temple knelt in the clearing and prayed, while the remaining men went about their daily chores.

The Blessed Myron Brown led the party, and with him was his son Enoch, and nine others. They strode without speaking through the woods. The Blessed Myron experienced a certain discomfort as the great yellow sun grew higher in the sky and the forest warmed; he was perspiring heavily beneath his thick gray woolen clothes. But this was merely a physical discomfort, and those he could bear with ease.

This other torment, though, that of finding people on this new world—that hurt him. He wanted to see these people with his own eyes, look upon them.

Near noon the village of the natives came in sight; the Blessed Myron was first to see it. He saw a huddle of crude low huts built around a medium-sized hill, atop which rose the snout of a corroded spaceship that had crashed into the hillside years, perhaps centuries earlier. The Blessed Myron pointed, and they went forward.

And several of the natives advanced from the village to meet them.

THERE WAS a girl, young and fair, and a man, and all the man wore was a scanty white cloth around his waist, and all the girl wore was the breechcloth and an additional binding round her breasts. The rest of their bodies—lean, tanned—were bare. The Blessed Myron offered a prayer that he would be kept from sin.

The girl stepped forward and said, "I'm the priestess Jeen of the McCaig. This is Lyle of the Kwitni, who is in charge. Who are you?"

"You—you speak English?" the Blessed Myron asked.

"We do. Who are you, and what are you doing on World? Where did you come from? What do you want here?"

The girl was openly impudent; and the sight of her

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sleek thighs made the muscles tighten along the Blessed Myron's jaws. Coldly he said, "We have come here from Earth. We will settle here."

"Earth? Where is that?"

The Blessed Myron smiled knowingly and glanced at his son and at the others. He noticed with some disapproval that Enoch was staring with perhaps too much curiosity at the lithe girl. "Earth is the planet from beyond the sky where you originally came from," he said. "Long ago—before you declined into savagery."

"You came from the place we came from?" The girl frowned. "We are not savages, though."

"You run naked and perform strange ceremonies by night; this is savagery, but all this must change. We will help you regain your stature as Earthmen again; we will show you how to build houses instead of shabby huts. And you must learn to wear clothing again."

"BUT SURELY we need no more clothing than this," Jeen said in surprise. She reached out and plucked a section of the Blessed Myron's gray woolen vestments between two of her fingers. "Your clothes are wet with the heat; how can you bear such silly things?"

"Nakedness is sinful," the Blessed Myron thundered.

Suddenly the man Lyle spoke. "Who are you, to tell us these things. Why have you come to World?"

The pair of natives exchanged looks. Jeen pointed at the half-buried spaceship that gleamed in the noonday sun. "To worship with us?"

"Of course not! You worship a ship, a piece of metal; you've fallen into decadent ways."

"We worship That which has brought us to World, for it is holy," Jeen snapped hotly. "And you?"

"We, too, worship That which has brought us to the world. But we shall teach you. We. . ."

The Blessed Myron stopped. He no longer had an audience. Jeen and Lyle had whirled suddenly and both of them sprinted away, back toward the village.

The temple men waited for more than half an hour. Finally the Blessed Myron said, "They will not come back. They are afraid of us. Let us return to our settlement and decide what is to be done."

THEY HEARD laughing and giggling coming from above. The Blessed Myron stared upward.

The trees were thick with the naked people; they had stealthily surrounded them. The Blessed Myron saw the

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impish face of the girl Jeen.

She called down to him: "Go back to your Lord and leave us alone, silly men! Leave World by tomorrow morning or we'll kill you!"

Engaged, the Blessed Myron shook his fist at the trees. "You chattering monkeys, we'll make human beings of you again!"

"And make us wear thick ugly clothes and worship a false god? You'd have to kill us first—if you could!"

"Come," the Blessed Myron said. "Back to the settlement. We cannot stay here longer."

THAT EVENING, in the rude building that had been erected during the day, the elders of the Temple of the New Resurrection met in solemn convocation, to discuss the problem of the people of the forest.

"They are obviously descendants of a wrecked colony ship," said the Blessed Myron, "but they make of sin a virtue. They have become as animals; in time, they will merely corrupt us to their ways."

The Elder Blessed Solomon Kane, called for the floor—an ascetic-featured, dour man with the cold, austere mind of a master mathematician or a master theologian. "As I see it, Brother, there are three choices facing us: we can return to Earth and apply for a new planet; or we can attempt to convert these people to our ways; or we can destroy them to the last man of them."

The Blessed Dominic Agnello objected: "Return to Earth is impossible. We have not the fuel."

"And," offered the Blessed Myron, "I testify that these creatures are incorrigible and beyond aid. They are none of them among the Blessed. We do not want to inflict slavery upon them, nor can we welcome them into our numbers."

"The alternative," said the Blessed Solomon Kane, "is clearly our only path. We must root them out as if they were a noxious pestilence. How great are their numbers?"

"Three or four hundred. Perhaps as many as five hundred, no more. We certainly outnumber them."

"And we have weapons. We can lay them low like weeds in the field."

A LIGHT appeared in the eyes of the Blessed Myron Brown. "We shall perform an act of purification; we will blot the heathen from our new world. The slate must be fresh, for here will we build the New Jerusalem."

The Blessed Leonid Markell, a slim mystic with flowing golden hair, smiled gently and said, "We are told,

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'Thou Shalt Not Kill', Brother Myron."

The Blessed Myron whirled on him. "The commandments are given to us, but they need interpretation. Would you say, *'Thou Shalt Not Kill'*, as the butcher raises his knife over a cow? Would you say..."

"The doctrine refers only to human life," said the Blessed Leonid softly. But..."

"I choose to construe it differently," the Blessed Myron said. His voice was deep and commanding, now; it was the voice of the prophet speaking, of the lawgiver. "Here on this world only those who worship the Lord may be considered human. Fleeing from the bitter scorn of our neighbors, we have come here to build a New Jerusalem in this wilderness—and we must remove every obstacle in our way. The Devil has placed these creatures here, to tempt us with their nakedness and laughter and sinful ways."

He stared at the rest of them, no longer were they his equals round the table, but now merely his disciples, as they had been all the long journey through the stars. "Tomorrow is the Sabbath day by our reckoning, and we shall rest. But on the day following we shall go armed to the village of the idolaters, and strike them down. Is that understood by us all?"

"*'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord,'*" the Blessed Loenid quoted mildly. But when the time came for the vote, he cast in his lot with the rest, and it was recorded as a unanimous decision; after the day of the Sabbath, the mocking forest-people would be eradicated.

BUT THE people of World had laws of their own, and a religion of their own; and they too held a convocation that evening, speaking long and earnestly round the councilfire. The priestess Jeen, garbed only in the red paint of death, danced before them, and when Lyle of the Kwitni called for a decision there were no dissenters.

The long night came to an end, and morning broke over World—and the spies returned from the settlement of the strangers, reporting that the false god still stood in the clearing, and that his followers showed no signs of obeying the command to depart.

"It is death, then," cried the priestess. And she led them in a dance round The Ship, and the knives were sharpened; then she and Lyle led them through the forest, swords that had hung in the cabin of the Captain McCaig aboard the Ship, and Jeen the other.

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The strangers were sleeping when the five hundred of the people of World burst in on their encampment. They woke gradually, in confusion, as the forest slayers moved among them, slicing throats. Dozens died before anyone knew what was taking place.

Curiously the strangers made no attempt to defend themselves. Jeen saw the great bearded man—he who had commanded her to wear clothes, and who had eyed her body so strangely—and he stood in the midst of his fellows, shouting in a mighty voice, "It is the Sabbath! Lift no weapon on the Sabbath! Pray, brothers, pray!"

SO THE strangers fell to their knees and prayed; and because they prayed to a false god, they died. It was hardly yet noon when the killing was done with, and the eight hundred members of the Temple of the New Resurrection lay dead.

Jeen the priestess said strangely, "They did not fight back. They let us kill them."

"They said it was the sabbath," Lyle of the Kwitni remarked. "But of course it was not the Sabbath—the Sabbath is three days hence."

Jeen shrugged. "We are well rid of them, anyway. anyway. They would have blasphemed."

There was more work to do, yet, after the bodies were carried to the sea. Fifty great trees were felled and stripped of their branches; the naked trunks were set aside while the men of the tribe climbed the cliff and caused the great ship, the false god in which the strangers had come, to topple on its side.

Then a roadway was made of the fifty great logs, and the men and women of the people of World pushed strainingly, and the great ship rolled with a groaning sound down the side of the hill, as the logs tumbled beneath it, and finally it went plunging toward the sea and dropped beneath the waves, sending up a mighty cascade of water.

THEY WERE all gone, then, the eight hundred intruders and their false god. And the people of World returned to their village and wearily danced out the praise of Their Ship.

They were not bloodthirsty people; they would have wished to welcome the eight hundred strange ones into their midst. But the strange ones were blasphemers, and so had to be killed, and their false god destroyed.

Jeen was happy, for her faith was renewed, and she danced gladly round the pitted and rusting Ship. Her god had been true, and the god of the strangers false, and what had been command-

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ed had been done; for it had been written in the *Book of the Ship,* which old Lorresson the priest recited to the people of World centuries ago in the days of the first McCaig and the first Kwitni, that there were certain commandments by which the people were to live.

Now one of these commandments was, *"Thou Shalt Not Kill,"* and another was, *"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy."* These the people of World hearkened to.

But they were godly people, and the Word was most holy. They had acted in concord with the dictates of Lorresson and McCaig and Kwitni and the Ship itself when they had slain the intruders and destroyed their ship. For, first of all the commandments they revered, it was written, *"Thou Shalt Have No Other Gods Before Me."*

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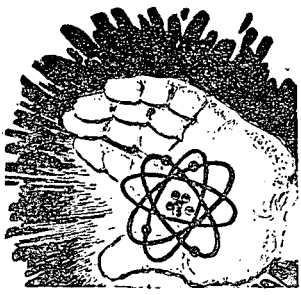
Editorial

FREEDOM?



IF PONTIUS PILATE had waited to hear The Lord's answer to his question, "What is truth?" he might have followed it up with an almost equally-perplexing question: "What is freedom?" He didn't, of course; like most men who think they know the answer to the nature of truth—or "know" that there is no answer—Pilate most probably was satisfied that he knew the meaning of "freedom." Even the Almighty cannot (because he will not) enlighten a man who is sure he knows the answers.

For the compleat Man of the World, as Pontius and his colleagues were (in ideal if not in fact) "freedom" can be pretty well defined as, "that ordering and disposing of affairs which permits me and my friends to get to the top, and stay there, and enjoy it." Whatever interferes, obviously, is an enemy of the precious liberty to which I am heir. Yet, even within this orbit, there was discipline and sacrifice. Pilate knew that he owed his position and his chances for achieving his ambitions to the Roman power, of which he was a representative. He would deliver a man he knew to be innocent of any crime worthy of death over to execution, in order to appease enemies who might invoke that power to the Procurator's disadvantage. And if the occasion arose where the only choice lay between death and betrayal of Rome, Pilate would choose the former and luxuriate in feelings of nobility between tremors.

The free masters of a world of slaves, then, were "free" to obey the authority by which they were masters; they knew the limitations of this freedom, and they knew the consequences of violating the essential discipline.

EVENTUALLY, after centuries of rebellion, people overthrew that particular discipline, so that they might be "free" to submit to a higher discipline, and the civilizations which we call Christendom came into being. To them, freedom meant that they were "free" to follow the discipline and authority

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of their faith, as ordered by The Church; they would not be persecuted for doing so. A certain minimum was required of all; beyond that, all men were "free" to accept as much greater a measure of discipline and obedience to authority as they freely chose. No man was forced to enter a monastery or into holy orders. Whatever interfered with a man's freedom to choose between being a son of The Church as a layman, or advancing within the Orders according to his ability, was the enemy of that man's liberty.

There came a time when numbers of people decided that this discipline violated certain "liberties"; and, as science fictionists, we think of those who wanted to free "science" from "religion". And while there is actually no incompatability between the two, the errors of men who held positions of authority at certain times made it seem that way.

Freedom now meant, "that ordering and disposing of affairs which permits me and my colleagues to investigate any aspect of nature I choose, affords me the opportunity of doing so, and does not interfere with my experiments or suppress my findings."

Now what was this "freedom" that had been won? Why, the freedom to submit to a rigid discipline of thought and methodology, an impersonal, non-moral discipline which was in no way concerned with a man's relations to his Creator or to his fellow men, but only with the accuracy of his observations; the unimpeachable logic of his reasoning; the duplicability of his experiments; the applicability of his maxims and theorems, etc.

MEANWHILE, in our own neighborhood, various other aspects of "freedom" came up. In the late 18th Century, the definition was "that ordering and disposing of affairs that permits me to enjoy life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness without paying taxes, or obeying laws, other than those imposed by legislatures of my own choice —direct or indirect—or supporting wars declared by sovereigns across the seas." However, the definition became quite broad in some ways: freedom meant, "freedom to submit to whatever discipline of faith I choose—or the freedom to reject all known ones, or the freedom to start my own." It included "freedom to investigate any aspect of nature I choose, etc.," up to a point.

The point was reached some time back. I am, theoretically, free to choose to investigate any aspect of nature I choose *providing*, in the event I choose particular ones, I can pass the required security checks. Well, we all haven't

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either the temper or ability to go into nuclear physics and relatedly sensitive subjects, anyway. And the scientists' period of freedom did not at any time extend to the proclamations of the latest discoveries in any science as necessary belief—anathema, loss of citizenship, etc., upon those who deny.

So Pontius Pilate, Gregory the Great, Benjamin Franklin, and Sigmund Freud all had one thing in common with Americans today: for all their submission to the discipline and authority they had freely chosen, they were never required by human law to swear or affirm to the truth of Gravity, nor could they be arrested for denying its existence. All were equally free to step off a high cliff, and—other things such as altitude, wind velocity, garments and apparel worn, etc., being equal—all would have fallen at the same rate of acceleration.

"FREEDOM" then doesn't exist in a "free" state; there can be freedom *from* something, there can be freedom *for* something—and a person usually wants to be free from something in order to be free for something else. Freedom from labor may mean freedom for loafing, freedom for a random selection of jobs or self-imposed projects, freedom for meditation, freedom for raising cain, etc. But any or all of these mean, in effect, submission to another type of discipline—it may be simpler and easier; it may be simpler but harder; it may be both more complex and difficult. Even loafing is a discipline of a sort; if you don't believe me, try sometime to devote a full week to it. You may be able to do it without thought for a day; after that, you'll likely find yourself planning some sort of order of idleness for the rest of the week.

The creation of fiction requires disciplines, too; these vary among the different types of story and at different times within the types. The science fiction author may imagine that he is "free" where other writers are not. Yes, in relation to his down-to-Earth mainstram colleague, in some respects.

And a large number of the mss. I look over indicates that the writers picked science fiction thinking that, since there is "freedom" in this field, there is no discipline involved. But science fiction worth preserving (I amost said "discussing", then remembered that horrid examples of sin can often instruct those with a will to virtue.) is created under an especially rigid discipline, a particular discipline of the imagination, which I'll go into next time. RAWL

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THE WILD ONES

Novelet of Earth's Frontier

by Tom Godwin

illustrated by EMSH

Once they'd been heroes, holding off a Reen attack. But now Earth had to show the Federation that man was mature, and the Reens were treated with courtesy. And Whitey Howard, who'd killed a Reen in self defense, would be hanged in the morning...

"HE'LL BE dead a long time and what will it gain any of you?" Clayton asked. "This is Freia not Earth. If you would only give him a chance..."

Colony Supervisor Martin tightened his lips, and Clayton knew that his plea was hopeless. He looked out the broad window at the quiet, orderly city of Greendale. Children were running and playing in the green central park, and the little spires of churches could be seen lifting

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above the cottages beyond. Very faintly, in the silence of the room, there came to him the tolling of their bells. It was a sweet, gentle sound, mocked by the gallows that stood new and ugly in the prison yard beyond Old Town. Shadows of near-sunset lay long across the city; in only ten hours it would be dawn again. They would lead Whitey Howard out to the gallows, handling him as they would some great, pale-eyed cat that had at last been captured and chained, and would soon cease to be a menace to those about him...

SUPERVISOR MARTIN spoke with deliberation: "John Howard knew, when he committed the crimes, what the penalty would be. He..."

"The crimes!" His mouth twisted in contempt. "Is refusal to step into the gutter for a pair of gobbling Reens worth a man's life?"

"The Reen witnesses claim he killed without provocation. It certainly cannot be denied that he killed the Terran policeman who would have settled the dispute."

"By accident—the policeman ran into the line of fire. Must a man be executed by his own government if he refuses to act humble before the Reens in his own town?"

"Howard killed a policeman who was trying to preserve the peace. He killed two Reen military officers, and made an already-critical situation dangerously critical. It is a situation you consistently fail to understand. The issues at stake are far greater than the life of John Howard. The Galactic Federation is watching us now, waiting to see how we will handle this crisis with the Reens. If we are to convince them we are a civilized race, eligible for admittance into the Federation, we will have to conduct ourselves in a civilized manner. The era of violence is gone—times have changed since the days you and Howard and the others first landed on Freia. Surely you realize that."

"Yes," Clayton answered. "I realize it more each day."

Nostalgia for the past touched him, with the faint tolling of the bells drifting across the quiet city like a death knell for the wild, free days gone by. He had known that the wild days would go, for they always went whenever civilization followed the explorers into the frontier. But he had not expected them to go so quickly...

HOW SHORT and fleeting the years are in retrospect. Twelve years in the past, and the *Space Hound* crossed the first interstellar gap, carrying the men of his own selection—bold and determined men, restless and ungentle men who were afraid

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of nothing. They found three yellow suns, and fought their way up from three hostile worlds, before they came to the one for which they searched. It was an ideal world, untouched, with only the wild animals to contest their claim to it. Then the semi-humanoid Reens came in their ship and disputed the Terran possession. There was battle, the Reens fleeing back to their home planet. They named their new world Thor, after the Teutonic god of thunder and might; upon their return to Earth the government changed the name to Freia, after the more gentle goddess.

Ten years in the past, and the *Space Hound* went back to Freia with a survey group, men who were very similar to the men of the *Space Hound* in their way of thinking and acting.

SEVEN YEARS in the past, and the new immigrant ship, the *Constellation,* set down beside their lusty, rowdy little town. The colonists had been selected by the Terran Colonization Board for their soberness and reliability; they brought with them a law and order that looked with disfavor on the noise and drinking in Old Town. That had been the beginning of the end.

Six years in the past, and the Reens came again, in a much larger ship and with military personnel, to build a garrison on the slope above Greendale. They calmly declared Freia to be their own discovery and the Terrans to be trespassers.

A massive ship of strange design appeared during the period of uncertainty following the Reen declaration, and a tall humanoid who called himself Valkaron made contact with both Terrans and Reens. He told them he represented the Galactic Federation, which held potential control over all the explored region of the galaxy, and that Freia would be kept under observation for an indefinite length of time.

HE HAD said: "So far, we have found more than one hundred different intelligent species within our sphere of exploration. Some of them have space flight, and some are near it; some are sufficiently mature in their philosophies to deserve admittance into the Federation. Some are not, and some are so immature that they represent a possible menace to the Federation and will be kept under control. Admittance into the Federation entitles that race to have free access to all the technological discoveries of the other member races; to trade freely with the member races; and to be assisted, whenever necessary, by the Federation Fleet in col-

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onization of the new worlds along the Federation frontier.

"Your method of settling your dispute concerning the ownership of Freia will determine whether one of you, both of you, or neither of you is entitled to become a member of the Federation. The Federation will neither interfere nor give advice. You must, w i t h o u t assistance, prove that you are intelligent and mature in your reactions and decisions—that you are capable of coping effectively with such situations as the present one."

The Federation ship departed, leaving a multi-faceted object hovering in space just outside of Freia's atmosphere. A force field surrounded it, a field based on some science unknown to both Terrans and Reens; it ignored all attempts in later years to communicate with it.

Five years in the past... f o u r...t h r e e...two... one... The *Constellation* brought more colonists to Freia in periodic voyages; the Reen ship brought more military personnel. The Terrans built their neat city and tended their green fields, while the Reens encroached farther and farther into Terran territory. The Terran population of Freia became sharply divided into two factions: the survey group and *Space Hound* group in Old Town, who wanted immediate and violent action to end the cold war; and the colonists in Greendale, who still hoped and believed that diplomacy and the conference table were more effective defense than anger and the snarl of atomic rifles.

"I AM NEITHER a cruel nor an unjust man," Martin said. "I regret the necessity of punishing John Howard for his crime. But there can be no alternative; if Howard is permitted to go unpunished, it will encourage others like him in Old Town to flout the law. It might have even more serious results: it might cause the Reens to carry out their threat to place Greendale under Reen martial rule for their own protection. We could not permit that, of course, and there would be war."

"You and the Colonization Board on Earth keep shutting your eyes to the obvious: there is going to be war, anyway. Freia is ours, and the Reens are trespassers. We could take the offensive and hit them hard and quick with the *Space Hound;* its' guns are longer range than those of the Reen ship. But where is the *Space Hound?*" Clayton was unable to keep the resentment out of his voice. "You took it away from us and put it to hauling ore from the moon mines."

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"The *Space Hound* will not be needed. It is inconceivable that the Reen situation should not have a non-violent solution. Slaughtering the Reens, as you recommend, would hardly make a favorable impression on the Federation. It is not impossible that such an action might cause them to consider us one of the races they must keep under control. It would almost certainly make us ineligible for Federation membership, and would deny us Federation protection along our future frontiers.

"FREIA IS only the beginning, Clayton. Our next objective, in the due course of time, would be the yellow suns beyond Orion. And there is all the galaxy beyond them, for thousands upon thousands of lightyears and lifetimes. Lone-wolf expansion is uncertain and dangerous, where expansion as a member of the Federation would be certain and steady and safe. That is our long-range goal, and it is best for us here on Freia to swallow our pride for a while and insure that we reach it."

"I can't agree with you," Clayton said. "We're supposed to turn the other cheek, and impress the Federation with our civilized patience. We're supposed to act humble before the Reens and thereby become a proud race, inspected, passed and approved by the Federation. To hell with the Federation; we got this far without their help, and we can go farther."

Martin answered with a deliberation greater than that of before, finality in his tone: "The day of the wild and irresponsible individual is past, whether such individuals like it or not. I had hoped for your cooperation—at least to the extent that you would try to keep your malcontents and lawbreakers in Old Town under control. I can see my hope was in vain." He glanced at the clock on the wall. "The Reen commander is due here for another conference in twenty minutes and I must ask you to go now."

Clayton stood up. "And Whitey Howard?"

"HOWARD will go to the gallows; there will be no stay of execution. And one last thing, Clayton"—The eyes of the supervisor were as hard as blue steel—"For your own welfare, and that of your friends, accept circumstances as they are and don't try to change them when you go back to Old Town. Do you understand?"

"Your threat is obvious enough," Clayton said; he turned away.

He almost collided with the supervisor's hurrying secretary as he went out the door. She rushed on past him, to say agitatedly to the supervisor as the door swung shut

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behind him: "Sir, the Reen commander and his party are already here, so far ahead of the appointed time that the escort isn't ready, and no one is..."

Clayton went down the corridor; he was twenty feet short of the outside door when its automatic mechanism swung it open and the Reens strode through. They were almost human in form, but with an appearance that always reminded him of buzzards: scaly skin, beady reptilian eyes set toward the sides of their heads in the manner of birds, and a red, wattled neck like that of a turkey.

THE REEN commander walked in the middle of the group, his uniform resplendent with insignia. Two sub-officers preceded him and two heavily-armed soldiers walked on each side of him, atomic rifles slung from their shoulders. Clayton was suddenly, acutely, aware of his empty holster—a city ordinance forbade the carrying of deadly weapons, and he had considered it unwise to risk discovery in the Administration Building—but there was nothing he could do but keep walking and know what was coming next.

The Reen group was five in width, the flanking soldiers close to the walls of the corridor and giving no indication of making room for him to pass. He could, of course, shoulder one of them aside and then drop to the floor a second later, hole through him, while the Reens continued on without having lost a step in their advance.

Later, one of the sub-officers would say to Martin: "Reen soldier when attacked unprovoked by Terran must defend self and commander. Incident very regretful. In future avoid by meeting Reens with proper escort."

The two sub-officers in the lead passed Clayton, their black, yellow-rimmed eyes dismissing him with one arrogant glance. The commander seemed not to see him at all, but the broad feet of the outside soldier made a quick sideward shuffle so that the butt of the slung rifle would strike him across the stomach. Already, he was so close to the wall that his shoulder was brushing it; he could take the blow or ignominiously turn and run.

CLAYTON took it painfully, keeping his face expressionless. The face of the soldier was very close as he passed, the round little eyes gleaming with amusement. He felt an almost overpowering desire to smash the scaly face, to watch the amusement change to pain and hear the Reen squawk and gobble in fear as he bent its wattled neck back until it broke.

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Behind the desire came the vision of Whitey's gallows, the sound of the dry voice of the Colonial Judge: *"A real or fancied slight to the dignity is not justification for deliberately taking the life of another intelligent being... the defense council's plea for clemency cannot be granted ...this court sentences the defendant, James Frederick Clayton, to be hanged by the neck until dead..."*

The Reens passed on, and he resumed his own progress, recalling the first time Reens and Terrans had met in conflict, realizing the true extent to which the times had changed. Clayon would never have believed, twelve years before, that the time could ever come when he would let a Reen strike him...

He went out the door, the setting sun bright in his face. The Reen aircar had been set down near the door, its landing gear crushing the carefully-tended grass. Once Supervisor Martin had suggested the aircar be left in the nearby parking lot and had been told: "Is not necessary that Reens walk long distance from aircar."

II

IT WAS almost half a mile from the Administration Building to Old Town, with a long east-west trending strip of wooded land dividing Old Town from Greendale, and separating the rough buildings of the former from the trim, neat houses of the latter. The little prison was at the east end of the wooded strip and the spaceship field at the west end—a field now empty, with the *Constellation* gone back to Earth and the *Space Hound* off on its run to the moon lines. The Reen garrison set to the slope above Old Town, the Reen-Terran border within a stone's throw of Old Town's north side.

Clayton came to the wooded strip and found Red O'Hara waiting restlessly for him, his beard like flaming copper in the last rays of the sun.

"What did he say?" Red asked.

"No dice."

"They can't hang him," Red said. They walked together through the trees and into the clearing, where the broken stump of the piper tree had been. "Whitey was the one who went into that crater on Centauri Four and fought his way through the medusa-beasts to Ramon. Whitey was the one who stood back-to back with me the day the Reens had us hemmed in. And it was Whitey, more than anyone else, who made the Reens pay five to one the night they broke the truce. Do you remember that night, Clay?"

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IT WAS NOT a question that required an answer. None of them would ever forget that night. It had been a surprise raid by the Reens, the truce suddenly null and void, and only Billy Gaylord and three sentries between the Reens and the sleeping camp. They had held the attack off, Billy and Delmont and the others, crouched under the piper tree, hearing it sing to them with tiny, fairy flutings as the breeze drifted through its curiously shaped leaves and knowing the time had come for all of them.

They held back the Reens until the forces in camp could be organized, dying with grim stubbornness under a tree that no longer sang but had become a shattered stump. Whitey had led the counter-attacking force, going ahead of the others like a swift, silent ghost in the darkness, making no sound until he was among the Reens with his blaster swinging and hissing and lighting up the night and their startled buzzard faces.

They had buried Billy Gaylord and the others beside the shattered piper tree the next day. They had drunk a toast to them and turned down four empty glasses, setting them over the stump's jagged splinters so the wind would not move them. Later, when the *Space Hound* returned with the survey group, the glasses were still there so they built a little fence around the tree and the graves.

Now, the broken tree and the glasses and the graves were gone, removed three months before by order of the city council. The council had stated: *A public display of this nature can serve only to remind Terrans and Reens alike of past enmity. In the interests of our efforts to establish friendly relations with the Reens, we find it advisable to order the bodies removed to a more suitable resting place.*

All that was left in the clearing was a lop-sided circle of transplanted sod, the grass as yet a little paler and shorter than the other grass.

"You can still tell that something used to be there," Red said. "But by late summer it will all look the same and the city council will be satisfied."

They went on across the clearing and up the gentle slope to the house by Old Town's edge where O'Hara lived, and where the others would be waiting for his return from his talk with Supervisor Martin.

"They can't hang him—we can't let them," Red said as they crossed the porch.

"First, we'll see if Johnny had any luck," Clayton replied.

THERE WERE six seated at the table in the room:

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Johnny Merrit, dark-eyed and sombre; his wife, Doris, calm and composed; Al Bender, tall and lantern-jawed, an old blaster scar twisting his ugly face to one side; Doc Pavich, his glasses not concealing the worry in his eyes; Mike Shannon, grim-faced, his jaws clenched on the stem of a cold pipe; Steve English, his thin, almost esthetic face betraying no emotion, but with a partly-empty bottle of whiskey before him.

"He wouldn't listen to me," Clayton said, and disappointment ran like something dark and invisible down the length of the table.

"We were afraid he wouldn't," Johnny said. "It was our last hope. The city council wouldn't consider convening to hear us, and we only got twenty names on our petition out of all the people in Greendale we asked."

STEVE ENGLISH poured himself a drink. "Failure was a foregone conclusion. This is the new era of gentle law and order and brotherly love for all creatures—or else."

Al said, "To hang a man for that—and there wouldn't be any Terrans on Freia if we hadn't killed Reens in the old days."

"It could as easily have been any of the rest of us," Mike said. "None of us would ever let a Reen shove us to one side."

Clayton smiled without humor. "I did, only a few minutes ago. I didn't have much choice."

Steve filled his glass again. "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the galaxy, by order of the Terran Colonization Board."

"You're drunk," Mike said.

"Drunk?" Steve held up the glass and observed the whiskey in it. "No, not yet. I intend to be, though; I don't want to know what time it is when morning comes, and I don't intend to know."

"Damn it, Steve," Al said, "we can't help Whitey that way."

"Then you name it and we'll do it," Steve said. "I'll be there."

"They doubled the guards at the prison this afternoon," Doris said. "Johnny wanted me to tell Whitey what we were trying to do, but they wouldn't let me in."

THERE WAS the sound of quick, light steps on the porch, and Clayton knew before he turned that it would be The Stray—the *Constellation* stowaway who called herself Gail Smith and who had attached herself to Doris and the *Space Hound* group, calmly moving in and asking neither their permission nor pardon.

She ran into the room with a swirl of her blue skirt, her brown curls disarranged by

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her hurrying, and her eyes bright with the excitement of what she had to tell them:

"The city council did meet again! They met, and they made another law, prohibiting the possession of arms. They're going to make a surprise search here in Old Town, and confiscate all weapons."

Unconsciously, the hand of every man moved to touch his concealed gun. They were all armed, with the temporary exception of Clayton. They had lived to lift their ship from three alien worlds only because their weapons were a little better, and their reflexes a little faster, than those of the aliens who opposed them. And for the past year they had lived with the Reen boundary, beyond which Terrans were forbidden to pass, a few hundred feet of where they slept.

Al cursed the city council in quick, brittle words and Mike's jaws bulged as he bit down on his pipe.

"So?" Doc said. "The search won't go any farther than here in Old Town."

"What time tonight?" Clayton asked. "Do you know?

SHE SEATED herself beside him, as she had done so often of late. "At midnight; it's all supposed to be secret and catch us by surprise."

"Disarmed, they'd have us as helpless as they want us," Johnny said. He looked up and down the table at the others and then at Clayton. "I think all of us knew all the time it would end in only one way of saving him.

"We had to make sure about it. Now we know. But there will be guards killed before we get him out. This is the last night in Old Town for any of us who take part in it."

"Freia is big," Al said. "We could go to the Western Continent."

"It would be better than any other place," Clayton agreed. "With luck, we could stay there a long time."

"How long?" Doris asked.

"Say ten years. Maybe fifteen."

"And then?"

"And then colonization of the Western Continent would be starting, and they would find it necessary to remove us."

"A lot might happen in ten years," Johnny said. Although he spoke to them all, it was obvious his words were intended for his wife. "We can have ten years for sure, or we can play it safe and let Whitey have ten hours."

She answered him with the calm determination typical of her. "I told you six years ago, Johnny, when I married you, that I would always go wherever you went. If I had wanted the quiet, safe life, I

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wouldn't have married you."

"Nothing about this is going to be fun," Clayton said. "All of you know that. Anyone who doesn't want to get into this isn't obliged to; he can leave the house now, with nobody saying anything."

Al's ugly face twisted in a sardonic smile. "No, we wouldn't say anything; we'd just watch you as you walked to the door. Anybody want to step off that distance and see how far it is?"

RED SHIFTED impatiently. "We're wasting time. We've all lived together and fought together too long for any of us to want to back out. So let's get on with the important things—how and when."

"The woods reach almost to the prison," Clayton said. Red and I will go in, with you others putting up the cover fire from the woods. We'll have to move fast, but with luck we can have Whitey out of there before the police can be called in from the city. We'll have to have an aircar ready by then. Johnny, you and Mike can take care of that. Pop Gilbert's survey crew aircar is big, and as fast as anything the police have. Two aircars would be better—you can see what Pop has to say about the chances of getting them without the police getting suspicious. It will have to be timed just right—you can't take them too far in advance."

"Well have an aircar, or aircars, ready on time, some way," Johnny said. "And that time would be...?"

"We'll start at eleven. That will give them time to think we've gone to bed. But the aircar plans will have to be made sure of before then."

GAIL TOUCHED Clayton on the arm and looked up at him in the gathering darkness. "Why not—why couldn't I tell all the ones we know we can trust to pretend to hold a party tonight? Then we could all be there for any police spies to see, right up until the minute it was time for us to slip out and go to the prison?"

No one seemed to want to hurt her feelings, and dampen her obvious enthusiasm, by telling her that her plan was impractical. So there was a little silence which Steve broke by asking softly, curiously: "Us?"

"Why—of course. Aren't we all in this together?"

"You don't have to be," Doc Pavich said. "Believe me, child, it's something too serious for you to want to be in."

Al said with rough kindness, "Stay out of it; and be dumb afterward and know nothing. If they ever found out you had known what we were going to do, and hadn't

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squealed on us, they'd give you life."

She looked up at Clayton again and he said, "Thanks for telling us about the city council, but let that be the limit. Don't play with fire when you don't have to."

"But I thought..." she said uncertainly, then looked over to Doris to ask, "Doris?"

HE OBSERVED again the understanding that existed between the two women—an understanding so deep that one word was all the stray girl needed to convey a complete question to the older woman.

"I go with Johnny to the Western Continent," Doris said. "You can go with us if you want to, but you'll find that ten years can be awfully short when you're young and your life is before you."

"My life—what life? To try to marry one of those slow clods in Greendale and inclose myself in the big coffin they call a house until I'm sick of living and they can put me in a smaller coffin?"

"Don't hate the Greendale boys," Doris said. "Their way is different from our way, but they're good boys."

"Yes, they're good boys," she said. The words came so ugly with hatred that he was almost glad the deepening darkness hid the way her young face would be twisted and distorted with the same hatred. "Good, clean, decent boys who go to church every Sunday, and sit there and look righteous and pious, and don't care what they did to somebody on weekdays."

It was the first time she had ever said anything about her past life. Doc violated the unwritten code by asking her, "Is that why you came to Freia and Old Town?"

"Yes," she answered. "Yes." Then the words came in a quick, defiant rush: "Now all of you know. It was one of the good, decent boys who gave me my start. It was the good, decent women who were so glad to tramp on me after I was down. At first I cared, then I didn't. I found better friends in the delinquent centers and in the prison. At least, they didn't pretend to be any better than they were. Then I hid on the *Constellation* so I could come here where I thought I would be"...the defiance trembled and almost broke... "would be welcome."

DORIS' VOICE was like the gentle, reassuring touch of a mother's hand: "You are welcome, honey. Always, wherever we go. But don't give your life's history like that again. It isn't done. Should everyone confess, you'd be shocked to learn what a den of thieves and murderers you're among."

"A debatable matter of

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viewpoint," Steve said. He spoke very casually, and Clayton saw it was his way of making the girl feel at ease again. "By definition, a criminal is one who commits a crime. A crime, by Society's definition, is the commission of an act or the ommission of a duty that is injurious to the public welfare. But the term 'injurious to the public welfare' has an amazing variety of interpretations.

"For example: civil war is injurious to the welfare of the entire nation, yet a soldier who refuses to commit acts contributing to that injury is imprisoned as a traitor—a criminal. You are a criminal if you rob and ruin a man with the threat of a gun; you are a respected businessman, and a pillar of the church and community, if you rob and ruin him with the fine print of a shrewd contract.

"Whitey killed two Reens and the policeman who would have stopped him; so Whitey is a condemned criminal, and the policeman a defunct hero. Had Whitey waited until Society formally admitted the Reens are our enemies, he would have been a hero for upholding Terran rights and dignity, and the policeman a criminal rat for interfering with a hero's duty. View the situation objectively and you will find we are not at all maladjusted individuals and criminals—we are noble, upstanding characters who have the misfortune of being in the wrong place at the wrong time."

RED GRUNTED in his beard. "We're going to be in a wronger place a few hours from now, and the sooner, the better. What time is it, anyway?"

"Eight," Clayton answered. "And we had all better part company now, in case the police are watching. Everybody go home and look innocent while he gets together what he wants to take along. Which can't be very much. Well meet here again at eleven, or sooner if something goes wrong."

"Any time," Red said. There was the scrape of his boots as he rose to go and a general movement as the others followed his example. "Any time—just give us the signal."

They went out through the door, casually, as though their return would be to do no more than converse or perhaps play a game of cards. He went with them to the porch and watched them go their way through the starlight. Gail lagged behind, to stop beside him, and Steve paused to light a cigaret and say, "Don Quixote and the windmills."

"Don Quixote?" Clayton asked.

"What we're going to do to-

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night is try to save something we lost when the *Constellation* brought the first load of colonists. We've reached the end of our trail, with our ship taken from us and no place for us to go. We don't belong here. We band together, and live in memories of the past and fret, because the days are so long. There's nothing for us to do—nothing but the old routine. Our group is an insignificant little minority and we know if we let them hang Whitey, it will be the opening act of the final scene for us."

"WE AREN'T alone," Clayton said. "The dissatisfied minority is larger than you think—all the ones in Old Town, and even a few among the colonists in the city. The minority has to conform now; but if there was some place for them to go, they would go there and set up their own brand of society. And if there was enough of them, the society they left behind would have to adapt when it caught up with them."

"Is that what you had in mind? That enough will want to follow us to the Western Continent?"

"No. The Western Continent is too close, too soon to be colonized by the others. But it's the only place we have to go."

Steve drew on his cigaret and its red glow lighted up his thin face. "Well, it won't be long until part of us will be on our way to it, and part of us won't care anymore. Or maybe none of us if luck is against us tonight. Either way, this pointless existence in a place we hate will be over." His cigaret arced in a quick movement as he turned to go. "I'll see you at eleven."

III

HE STOOD after Steve was gone and watched the lights of the city; the stationary lights of buildings, and the moving lights of vehicles. Greendale was moving quietly about its business, with no sign of any undue activity on the part of the police. But there wouldn't be. The police were not fools, to advertize their actions.

There was a shifting brightness to the east, shining through the intervening trees, that had never been there before. It would be searchlights, of course, swinging back and forth across the area outside the prison fence. There had been a rumor that day that searchlights were being set up to help guard the prison during Whitey's last night. The presence of the searchlights, combined with Martin's warning, belied the quiet normalcy of the night. The feeling came to Clayton that they had waited too long, far too long. They had hoped to the

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last that they could save Whitey's life without violence. They should have known better...

"Clay..."

He had almost forgotten about her, standing so silently on the porch beside him. "You had better go if you really think you want to get mixed up in this," he said. "Get together the little things you will want to take along."

"I don't have anything to take. Only the clothes I wear, and they belong to Doris."

"Then go home and spend the time reconsidering this deal. Make yourself see what you'll be getting into."

Her face was a pale oval in the starlight as she looked up at him. "Is it...that you don't want me along?"

IT WAS harder than he had thought it would be to maintain an aloof and impartial tone. "It doesn't matter to me, one way or the other. I'm speaking of what is best for you."

"Oh—of course." There was a little silence and then coldly, "Thank you for your advice." Then the coldness was replaced with a surge of anger. "You already know why I want to go along. I'm twenty-three years old, and I've been in five different kinds of prisons in that time. What kind of a life would I live among the decent people with them knowing that?"

"There can be worse and shorter ways of living your life."

"Then why don't you take the best way—why don't you stay here?"

"Whitey," he answered. "They're going to hang him in the morning."

"Yes—Whitey. The symbol to you and the others of the freedom you've partly lost and will lose completely if you stay here. Isn't that what Steve said, and isn't it true?"

"Yes, I suppose it is."

"I've never had any freedom to lose. Only since I've been here in Old Town. It's good to be free and be among people who respect you for what you are, and don't care what you were. It's—it's something worth fighting for and that makes Whitey a symbol for me, too."

Something seemed to move just above the trees that separated Old Town from the city. He watched intently as she spoke, seeing it almost clearly against the stars for a moment.

It was an aircar, without lights, and only the police were permitted to fly without running lights.

"Quick," he said to her. "Go tell the others the police are here. Tell them I..."

A VOICE spoke with cold amusement from within the dark doorway behind them: "That won't be necessary. And don't move, Clayton

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—don't move a muscle or make a sound until we have a little light here."

He spoke without turning: "The switch for the doorway light is on your left."

"Thanks," the voice answered dryly. "But I'll push this other one, since it's part of my business to know that the left hand switch turns on the floodlight for the lawn."

There was a click and the soft glow of the doorway light dispelled the darkness, disclosing Gail standing wide-eyed and tense, watching the person in the doorway. He turned without waiting for permission, to look into the muzzle of a gun, and the glittering black eyes of a man who were the plain clothes of the Colonial Police.

"Delemar, captain, Colonial Police," the man said. He smiled thinly at Clayton. "I always like to introduce myself and make sure everyone knows I represent the law. Then if I'm resisted, I can take appropriate measures with a clear conscience."

"I see. Thanks for the warning. How long have you been hiding in that back room?"

"LONG ENOUGH to hear the plans. The conversation was picked up and recorded, of course. We of the police department have known all the time you would attempt a prison break as the l[illegible] report. Today we planted the story of the arms confiscation to bring things to a head early tonight. You will all have several years in the moon mines in which to ponder upon the fact that one should not too implicitly trust a stooge's statement."

"You lie—you lie!" The girl's words came quick and sharp with protest and hatred. She swung on Clayton, her tone changing. "I didn't know the story wasn't true—how could I know? He lies, and I didn't know." She clutched his arm when he did not answer. "It's the police way, Clay—divide and rule. Don't you see? I was only trying to help you..."

Delemar was smiling a little as he watched her, as though her protests were amusing to hear. He seemed to be in no hurry to handcuff them and take them with him. It was not the way a man like Delemar would normally act; it was as though he might be waiting on something...

"Where to now, Delemar?" Clayton asked. "You didn't come here to loaf in the doorway all night."

"Only a few minutes more, then the boys will pick up the others and we'll all go."

"Why the wait?"

Delemar flicked his black eyes to his watch and back to Clayton. "Then there will no longer be such a strong incentive for the others to resist us."

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It seemed to him that understanding of the implications of Delemar's statement came slowly and then froze his own reactions for a moment. "You mean—they've moved up the execution time?"

"Yes. It was decided to do that in the interests of the public welfare."

CLAYTON moved a half step toward Delemar and the blaster stabbed forward to meet him. "When?"

"They'll be leading him to the gallows now."

There was an intense alertness in Delemar's manner as he finished speaking, and the gun was held very near and motionless. It occurred to Clayton that he and the others had consistently underrated the ineffectual bumbling of Society. Society was not at all ineffectual; Society employed men to protect it who were fully as violent by nature and dangerous as any who had ever ridden the *Space Hound*. Delemar was a wolf in the clothing of the Colonial Police, waiting with the killer lust in his eyes for some move that could be interpreted as an attack. Delemar had come to kill him, knowing that he would never wait meekly while they hanged Whitey. It was an efficient metod of ridding Society of a menace, and very moral and legal.

HE CALCULATED the chances he might have and found them to be virtually nonexistent. The vines at the end of the porch concealed the three of them from the other houses in Old Town. There was only the dark woods to his back, curving a little on the eastern end so that the prison searchlights were screened. He saw that one light was no longer shifting; it had become a steady, bright glow through the trees. That would be the light they would have to illuminate the gallows.

"There's nothing you can do, is there?" The thin, mocking smile was back on Delemar's face. "Nothing, except wait while they hang him. But it won't take them long—only another minute or so."

Gail was indistinctly visible to him as he watched Delemar; dark hair and pale face above a white blouse, her hands lifted to her breasts and fumbled with the collar of her blouse. He shifted his weight so that he could move as quickly as possible and Delemar detected the movement, slight though it was. His eyes burned with anticipation.

"Only another minute or so, Clayton, and then he will be dead..."

Gail's hands jerked away from the low-cut collar of her blouse. For an infinitesimal instant there was the gleam

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of metal before her, then a pale blue beam stabbed out at Delemar with a sharp hiss. He was flung backward by it, his eyes losing their glitter and going wide with surprise and disbelief. He fired as he fell, but his own beam went wide of Clayton and out into the night—a slender blue lance that was gone almost before it could be seen. Clayton knocked the weapon from his hand and saw that the beam had struck him very near the heart.

DELEMAR braced his hands on the floor and looked up at Gail with the surprise and disbelief gone, and on his face the bitterness of realization.

"I made a mistake," he said. "I should have watched you." He turned to Clayton and his breath rasped harshly as he tried to laugh. "I always wondered who would be the man good enough to get me. I always wanted to see the face of that man. I never thought it would be a scared little exchippy. The ignoble end, Clayton, for a man who... who..."

He slumped forward and died in midsentence.

"He—he was waiting to kill you," Gail said. Then the gun dropped from her hand with a clatter and she wavered on her feet. "Clay, I'm—I'm sick. I was a lot of things but I never did hurt anybody before— I never did kill anybody before..."

He took her by the shoulders and swung her around, away from the sight of Delemar. "Go tell Red," he said. "Tell him I've already gone on." He gave her a little shove. "Run!"

She obeyed, staggering a step from the shove and then running across the porch and around it toward the house where Red lived. He scooped the guns off the floor and took the necklace-like police communicator that Delemar wore. He stepped over Delemar to sieze an atomic rifle from inside the house and ran back out and on toward the distant searchlights. He glanced back once when he reached the trees and saw the dark form of Delemar lying shapelessly under the dim light, heard the voice of Gail calling from where she ran in the darkness beyond:

"Red—quick, Red—they're hanging Whitey..."

HE REACHED the eastern end of the woods and stopped, with the last trees concealing him as he looked across the bare and light-swept ground that reached for two hundred feet to the prison fence. Guards armed with atomic rifles stood post at the gate, and at the corners, while other guards patrolled the area outside the fence.

The gallows was clearly visible inside the fence,

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bathed in the bright light of the searchlight. Whitey stood on it, under the projecting beam, his arms and legs bound. He was a tall man, so tall that the executioner was having to reach up as he adjusted the noose around his neck. Five men stood some distance from the gallows, watching the hangman and Whitey. Two Reens stood a little apart from the five men, their uniforms glittering with sub-officer insignia. It was very quiet, and Clayton could hear their twittering gabble as they talked to each other.

He set the atomic rifle to the lightest charge possible and slid the muzzle of it across a low limb, where he could hold it steady as he aimed at the rope above Whitey's head. He waited, hoping the others would not be too long in coming. The prison would be transformed into a savage killing machine when he fired—the searchlights would focus on his position; the guards would pour concentrated fire into it; the prison siren would whoop and scream for reinforcements from the city. He could not hope to live to reach Whitey unaided, yet he would have to fire when the hangman left the platform and the water began flowing into the tripping tank under the trapdoor.

A POLICE car passed overhead, almost brushing the tree tops, dark and silent and betraying its passage only by the stars it obliterated. One of the Reens shifted impatiently on his stick-like legs and spoke to the five men in shrill complaint: "Why is it taking so long? Reen officers cannot wait all night to witness simple execution."

Someone in the Terran group made a reply he could not distinguish. Whitey looked down at the Reens and it seemed to him he could see Whitey smiling a little at them, could see the muscles of his arms bunch and ripple as he thought of gripping their necks in his hands.

It was no more than four hundred feet from the prison to the Reen border. Reen sentries patrolled it, as always; but this night their handlights were not stabbing inquisitively into Terran territory as was usual. There was something of much greater interest to observe. There was, he thought, a certain advantage to the bird-like location of the Reens' eyes—a sentry could walk his post facing straight ahead and still watch the hanging of a Terran.

THE HANGMAN finished with the rope and slid the black hood down over Whitey's face. Clayton nestled his cheek against the stock of the rifle and brought the sights in line with the rope, just under the beam. The hangman made a last ap-

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praisal of his work and then stepped off the platform and down to the ground. Whitey was left alone on the gallows, a tall, black-masked figure in the searchlight's glare, and Clayton wondered what he would be thinking as he stood there cut off from the world; no sound for him to hear but the distant crunch of gravel as the guards patrolled the fence, no last sight of sky and stars for him to see through the heavy mask. He would be thinking of the others of the wild bunch, perhaps; wondering if they would be planning to free him before dawn and not knowing he already stood on the scaffold...

Clayton thought he heard the faint sound of Red and the others coming through the trees. He could not be sure, and he could wait no longer.

He fired. The quiet was shattered by the harsh snarl of the rifle and the cracking report as the underhalf of the beam above Whitey's head was shattered into splinters. Whitey was thrown to the floor, the severed rope flung like a whip by the explosion. For an instant, the guards were frozen in surprise, the men and Reens in the prison yard staring and motionless. Then the nearer guard flung up his rifle and Clayton leaped away from the tree and deeper into the protection of the other trees. There was a lick of flame from the guard's rifle and the tree he had left disappeared in a thunderous explosion. A guard's whistle screeched and the two Reens ran toward the prison gate, one of them already gabbling shrill instructions to the staring Reen sentry, four hundred feet away.

THE OTHER guards joined in the firing, and explosions thumped and thundered around Clayton. A searchlight swiveled to pour down through the trees in blinding whiteness. He fired at it and it vanished, to be replaced a moment later by another. The leader of the guards yelled something at his men that was drowned out by the first wail of the prison siren, and a tree exploded so near him that he was struck numbingly along the shoulder by one of the broken limbs.

The other searchlights swung to seek him out among the trees. The prison siren rose to a vibrating, warning scream; the siren of the police aircar whined an undertone as it swooped down toward the trees. He fired again, and at the same time there came the voice of Red somewhere behind him: *"Now!"*

Three rifles snarled in unison, and the searchlights suddenly ceased to exist; prison and yard and trees were plunged into blackness. A guard shouted in the darkness

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and fired wildly. The aircar's spotlight flashed on to illuminate the trees and the blue beam of its heavy blaster lashed down. The red tongue of an atomic rifle reached up, and the aircar jerked in mid-air, spun, and dropped. The beam of its gun ripped a finger of destruction across the clearing as it fell, smashing the guards at the gate and the running Reens into shapeless, lifeless lumps on the ground as it passed.

The aircar struck the ground with a muffled crash and the blaster beam went dark. But the spotlight remained, pointing aimlessly against the wall of the prison and dimly lighting up the yard.

"RED?" CLAYTON called, trying to see back through the dark trees.

"Here—four of us," Red answered, hurrying toward him. "Steve, Al and Doc to cover us."

A guard shot at the sound of the voice and missed. One of the rifles behind Red fired in return and did not miss. The remaining guards opened up, then, and Clayton shouted to Red above the thunder and roar: "Let's go—the police are coming."

IV

THEY BROKE from the protection of the trees with the rifles behind them laying down a protective barrage. The guards, deprived of the advantage of their searchlights, were picked off with methodical efficiency. The last guard was dead before he and Red had covered half the distance to the gate. The prison siren stopped, its scream dying into silence, and there came the distant sound of police aircar sirens in the city.

Something struck the ground close in front of them and ripped a jagged furrow through the rocky soil. At the same time he saw the flash of a Reen sentry's rifle. One of the rifles in the trees snarled in reply and the sentry disappeared in a cloud of disintegrated soil.

They went through the gate and past the formless shapes that had been men and Reens, past something else that had been a guard before one of the rifles in the trees caught him.

There had been eight guards; now, all of them were dead, killed in their line of duty. Clayton found neither regret nor pleasure in their deaths. They had been the representatives of a society that no longer wanted him or his kind to exist. Society had planned a grand coup for that night; had planned to hang Whitey in advance of the scheduled time, had planned his own death, had planned the exile of the others to the moon mines. Once he and the

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others had been of value to Society. Now their purpose was served, and Society had no further use for them.

They leaped across a crater torn in the ground and ran faster toward the gallows, as the sound of the approaching police sirens swelled louder. They would have no more than one minute to free Whitey and return to the trees at best. And if the rifles in the trees failed to hold back the front wave of aircars, they would be blasted there in the prison yard.

He thought *Is this the goal we fought for across four different worlds?* And the voice of Supervisor Martin answered him in his mind, *You do not understand the situation.*

THE FIVE MEN were gone, and Whitey stood by the gallows. He had managed to remove the hood and he watched their approach with the light from the prison wall accenting the pale eyes under pale brows.

He smiled at them, almost casually, and said, "I'm glad to see you. I didn't know you were coming this early."

"We almost didn't," Red said.

Clayton cut the manacles and chains with his beam, and there was no futher conversation; no time for anything but to try to get back to the trees before the police were within range. There was one brief exchange of fire between the aircar in the lead and the rifles in the trees just before they reached safety, the police making the mistake of beginning the duel before they were in effective range. The aircar spiraled downward and the aircars behind it spread apart and sank lower so they would not be outlined against the stars.

"They're learning," Red observed.

THEY FOUND Al and Steve waiting for them in the trees. There was only a brief greeting to Whitey before they hurried on their way, with Steve saying, "We thought you might like the fire better than the frying pan."

There was no sign of Doc, and Clayton knew without asking what had happened. Nor did Red ask. They were halfway back to Old Town when Al said, "They got Doc tonight, Whitey."

Whitey walked on a little way before he said, "So we left Doc back there?" Another silence, and then, "The police—the damned police. They killed a better man tonight than all of them put together would ever make."

They stopped once to listen at a rumbling, clanking sound from toward the Reen garrison—a sound that seemed to be coming toward the border.

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"Tanks," he said. "With three Reens killed, they finally have the excuse they're been wanting."

"Then it should be an interesting night," Whitey remarked. "No matter which side wins, they'll want our hides."

They went on again, with Red asking, "Where are those police cars? They should be ripping the woods apart for us by now."

"Maybe they'll be waiting for us in Old Town," he answered. "Or maybe they were called back to the city—maybe the city is already being mobilized bor b i g g e r game than us: the Reens."

OLD TOWN was a hornet's nest, with a constant coming and going on the single street. Most of the men were armed, and many of the teen-age boys. They met Pop Gilbert at the edge of town, a rifle in his hands. There was no longer about him the slow, gentle appearance that had given him his nickname.

"I see you made it," he said. "But Doc— I thought he went with you?"

"He did," Red answered.

"So they got him? We're going to need him before this is over—and nobody knows how it will all end."

"What happened?" Clayton asked.

"The police came in like they owned Old Town and we were nothing but insignificant riffraff. They told us afterword they were only after you boys from the *Space Hound*, but it was too late, then. One of the police got rough with Mendivel when he thought Mendivel was hiding something, and Mendivel split him open with that knife he carries. King shot the one who would have killed Mendivel, and all hell was to pay after that. Foster and Sheridan and Ekhart were killed before the police were driven back, and Townsend is dying."

"Then all of Old Town is in this," C l a y t o n said. "I didn't want that to happen. Were any more hurt?"

"Not bad enough to be serious. Except the girl, Gail Smith. She was nicked with a stray beam from a sneak gun; all the police were carrying sneak guns."

Al cursed softly and Steve said, "So they wanted us that bad?"

"Where did it hit her?" he asked.

"Along the shoulder."

HE ESTIMATED the length of time it would take the spreading paralysis produced by the sneak gun wound to reach her heart and found it to be five hours. There was a means of counter-acting the paralysis if treatment could be given in time; a treatment involving

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drugs known only to police physicians. The sneak gun was not often used by the police; only when they were dealing with desparate criminals and wished to make certain of a clean sweep. The wounded who escaped could feel the slow, inexorable spreading of the cold paralysis and take their choice between surrender and unpleasant dying.

He spoke to Gilbert: "Those were the police who came at the same time Red and the others left?"

"Yes. We thought more would be back by now, but they haven't showed up yet."

"They've all been recalled to the city, I'm sure," he said. "Three Reens were killed a while ago, and we heard Reen tanks coming toward the border. There will be Reen soldiers behind the tanks. They may go across the border at any time, and Old Town will receive part of their attention. Get the women and children out. Red, you and Al help him and see to it that Gail goes with them so she can be treated. Don't let them stop for anything—not even their clothes. The Reens may advance any minute, and then it will be too late."

"WHAT DO the rest of us do?" Whitey asked when the other three were gone. "Do we skewer some Reens to while away the time?"

"Remember that narrow swale that runs from Old Town up toward the Reen camp?" Clayton asked. "It's deep with grass most of the way; a man could crawl up it almost to the Reen headquarters building and not be seen if he was lucky, and if he had something like a heavy cloud of smoke for cover. There's a little drift of a breeze tonight, enough to carry the smoke up the swale."

Steve looked toward the invisible Reen camp and then back to the brightly lighted street. "So we burn Old Town?"

"There's nothing else that can give us enough smoke. If a few of us could manage to get into Reen headquarters, I think we might be able to persuade them to turn over their ship."

Whitey smiled. "I'm sure we could."

"Some of them in Old Town may object to your burning everything they own," Clayton went on. "It can't be helped. Tell them they won't even own thir personal freedom by tomorrow if the Reens aren't stopped. And tell them a ship is leaving for Orion before morning, with room for all who want to go along."

"Orion!" Steve said. "I'll be damned— I was still thinking of the Western Continent. It goes to prove how limited a man's perspective can become

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when he gets too much civilization."

"Beyond even the Federation's frontier," Whitey said. "When do we start the fire?"

"As soon as the women and children are cleared out. Use plenty of help so that the whole town will go up at once."

"Then off we go, we merry arsonists," Steve said. "But where will you be?"

"On the little knoll just northwest of Old Town. When you leave Old Town, head into the trees as if you were all going to the city. Then circle around to where I am."

HE WENT along the dark north side of Old Town and to the tree-covered knoll. There he found a position where he could view both the Reen camp and the city, as well as Old Town.

The Reen camp was dark but sounds were coming from it; the gabble of low-pitched commands, the mutter and rustle of wheeled vehicles moving without lights. There was a distinguishable southward movement of the sounds, toward the border. The tanks were no longer to be heard and he presumed they were stopped and waiting at the border where the best break-through point would be; past the prison.

There was a fast and orderly movement of southbound traffic in the city, both vehicular and pedestrian. Apparently Martin was fully aware of the impending attack, as he had thought, and the north end of the city was being evacuated as rapidly as possible.

The hurried movements along Old Town's street were continuing, with women and children going in a thin line into the trees. The last of them were leaving Old Town when he pressed the activator button of the communicator that had belonged to Delemar.

IT CLICKED metallically, burped as it went through some automatic relay, and a voice spoke: "Anzac. West by south."

"Never mind the identification code," he said. "Delemar is dead. This is Clayton. Connect me through to Martin."

There was a pause and the voice asked, "Why should I?"

"Because the Reens are massing now on the border and you're a fool if you waste any allies."

There was another pause, a faint sound of talking, and then the voice of Supervisor Martin, chill as ice: "Yes?"

"The Reens are coming a-calling," he said. "I see you already know that. You're going to need all the help you can raise. I suppose there are only about a dozen of us that you want dead or alive. I want you to tell me who they are; then the innocent in Old

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Town can help fight the Reens without fear of the police landing on their necks the moment it's all over."

"And the guilty?" Martin asked.

"Will take care of themselves. The women and children have already been sent into the city. That includes a girl who was shot with a sneak gun, and will have to have immediate treatment. I would like your promise that she will be taken care of and that none of the innocent will be prosecuted. Give me that promise, name the guilty so we'll know where we stand, and we guilty ones will help fight the Reens until the tide turns in your favor and the Reens are ready to go under. Then our little truce will be over and you can have your police dogs bring us in if they can."

"IT IS NOT the policy of the police to prosecute the innocent, despite your biased views to the contrary," Martin said. "The following will face trial for mass-murder when apprehended: you, Howard, Merrit, English, O'Hara, Bender, Pavich, Shannon, and the two who killed the police in Old Town, Mendivel and King. No serious charges will be placed against any of the others. But the guilty ten are to be brought back, dead or alive, as soon as circumstances permit."

"Fair enough. None of us asked for fatherly forgiveness."

"Forgiveness?" Martin asked. "Can you really comprehend what you have done? Tonight you destroyed all hope for a peaceful solution of the Reen crisis. You have involved us in a war, and the Federation will hold all Terrans responsible for the actions of you irresponsible few. Tonight you killed, and set forces in motion that will continue to kill, and you feel neither guilt nor responsibility."

"We had no desire to kill. We were forced, by your own actions, to do so. The responsibility for what may happen tonight is yours, not ours."

THERE WAS a silence so long that Clayton thought Martin was not going to reply. Then Martin said: "Your viewpoint is typical of the outlaw. The persecution obsession. In a way, Clayton, I'm sorry. Once you and the others were of value to society, and were free and respected. It is unfortunate that you found it impossible to alter your emotions and way of thinking to fit the altered circumstances."

The sounds in the darkness indicated that the last of the Reens had reached the border and were waiting. There was only darkness at the Reen garrison but for the warship, which thrust its prow in black

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silhouette against the stars, pointing like an omen at high Orion. "Maybe you're right, Martin," Clayton said, almost absently, his eyes still on the ship. "Or maybe we're both like the blind men who couldn't agree on how an elephant was shaped. Neither of us will ever know."

He switched off the communicator. There was nothing more to say to Martin, nothing more that Martin would want to say to him.

There was the sound of footsteps coming from Old Town and he watched until a small figure resolved itself out of the dimness. He saw that it was Gail.

"Clay—where are you?" she called softly, stopping to look about her.

"Here," he said.

SHE CAME to him, carrying a heavy atomic rifle, and said, "The others will be here pretty soon."

"You were supposed to go into the city—didn't they tell you that?"

"Red ordered me to," she said. "I told him I wouldn't and when he tried to make me, I kicked him in the shins. Then"—indignation came into her voice— "he spanked me, damn him. So I pretended to go and slipped back up here."

"You'll have to go," he said. "You were shot with a sneak gun and it will have to be treated by a police physician."

"No. It doesn't hurt at all —I told Red it didn't. It's only sort of numb and cold there."

"The numbness will keep spreading. When it reaches your heart, you'll die."

"No! You and Red just say that. You say it because you still don't—don't want me along."

"I wouldn't lie to you, Gail," he said gently.

Her face was a pale oval in the starlight as it had been once before that night when she looked up at him. "Honest, Clay?"

"Honest. You only have about five hours."

"And how long before I could come back?"

He found the reply unpleasant to make. "The treatment takes a day and night."

"Not that long—surely not that long! I thought I could go into the city for a little while—but not for a day and night."

"You have to."

"You're going on to Orion, aren't you?" she asked. "Before morning you would be gone. If I go into the city now, I will never leave Freia, never see any of you again."

"If you don't go, you will never see anything again."

"It—does it hurt much when the end comes?"

"It hurts a lot during the last hour," he answered.

"FIVE HOURS ... five hours to help fight and pretend I will be going on to

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Orion with you. Or all my life to live in that prison they call a city, with no way to ever leave it and find any of you again. Help me, Clay—tell me what I should do."

"Go back," he said. "You'll find other friends in the years to come."

"Not like the ones who will be gone—not ever friends like them. Tell me, Clay—whichever I should do, will anybody miss me and say to each other that they wished I could have come along?"

"We would miss you," he said. "We would always remember you. And maybe someday we could come back."

"No. Not come back. You know you will never come back."

He knew she spoke the truth and he did not deny it. He took the rifle from her hands and leaned it against the tree. "You have to go now," he said. "We don't dare wait any longer."

"I..." The one word was a little cry of terrible indecision, of helpless yearning, and she did not move to go. He took her by the shoulders and turned her around to face the city; her right shoulder soft and warm under his fingers, her left shoulder cold with the creeping death.

"Go," he said. "Hurry, or it will be too late."

She took a forward step, then stopped and turned. "No—not yet. Let me wait a little while..."

V

A FLARE blossomed high in the sky with blinding brilliance, blazing like an intense white sun. It transformed the night into midday, etching the city and trees in vivid white and black. It exposed the Reen forces massed along the border and the tanks lunged forward with the Reen infantry close behind. Long-range atomic rifles in the city began to flash and the earth heaved and erupted in front of the tanks. They shuddered and lurched but did not stop, returning the fire with their own long-range rifles. The Reen troops added to the fire of the tanks, and they laid down a barrage that ripped and smashed into the edge of the city, the sound of the explosions a rolling thunder that filled the night and made the leaves of the piper tree tremble and whimper.

"Clay..." Gail was looking up at him, trying to laugh, with the harsh, bright glare pouring down on her face. "It's already too late. I'm glad it will be this way. I would rather my own kind would drink to me in the morning, and turn down an empty glass, than to live forever in a prison city where I didn't belong."

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He did not answer; there was nothing he could say to her.

Something red flickered in Old Town, a leaping tongue of fire that became a spreading sheet. Within seconds, Old Town was a roaring mass of flames, rolling fifty feet into the air. A heavy pall of smoke spread above the flames and around them, a pall that began to drift slowly to the north and hid the ground as it went.

WHITEY and Red came through the trees with the others not far behind; a large group with men in it as old as Pop Gilbert and as young as the eighteen-year-old McDonald twins.

"No trouble," Whitey said. He looked at Gail but did not comment on her presence.

Gail was facing Red defiantly and he said, "I wish you had believed me."

There was no change of expression on Whitey's face, no discernable compassion in his eyes, but he smiled in the way he had smiled the night the Reens killed Billy Gaylord. "We'll have to remember this, Clay," he said.

Gail went to her rifle and picked it up, not understanding what Whitey meant nor that he referred to the police who had shot her. "I didn't believe you," she said to Red. "I'm sorry—what I called you."

Johnny came up, Doris walking beside him as easily as though they were only out for an evening stroll. Then she saw Gail, and for the first time in the six years Clayton had known her she lost some of her composure.

"Gail!" she cried, and her voice caught in her throat on the word. She went to her and put her arm around her. "Gail—you little fool—why couldn't you have believed us?"

"I thought it was only that you didn't want me along—but it's all right," Gail said. "This is where I would want to be."

Doris led her a little to one side as the others came up. They looked at her as they came and then looked away again, trying to appear casual about her presence and overdoing it a little.

POP GILBERT spoke to Clayton about the task before them. "There are forty-four of us," he said. "Is that enough to get through the Reen guards?"

"I think we stand a good chance if the wind doesn't change and blow the smoke to one side," he said. "It looks as if they have almost their entire force in the city, and are depending on the ship's guns to turn back any counter-attack into Reen territory. If we can get close enough before they see us, they won't be able [illegible]

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ship without killing their own guards."

"What if the commander considers the guards expendable?" Gilbert asked.

"No doubt, he will. But if we're in the building soon enough, any blast at the building to get us would get him, too. He wouldn't want anything like that."

Al, watching the city, said, "They're shoving right along. It doesn't look too good for our side."

"Our side?" Whitey asked. "You mean, it used to be our side before they decided we weren't gentle enough with the Reens."

"I know," Al replied. "But you can't blame them all. And it's still the Terran side and we're Terrans."

CLAYTON saw that the Reens were destroying with definite method as they drove their column into the edge of the city, the two tanks in the lead blasting residences to dust but leaving unharmed the shops and factories that the Reens would find of value after the battle was over.

The eighteen-year-old McDonald twins crowded forward with insolent disregard for their elders, each carrying a rifle. They confronted Clayton, identical twins with faces so equally freckled and homely that he could never tell which was Tom and which was Jerry.

"Let's go," one of them said. "What are we waiting for?"

Red stepped forward to turn the impatient boy around the other way with an effortless reach of one hand. "Get back," he said, not unkindly. "Both of you. Stay back and be patient. There will be plenty for everybody to do in a few minutes."

The twins obeyed with reluctant ill grace and Mendivel, the man who had killed the policeman with his knife, smiled at them. "Eet weel not be long, *muchachos mio*," he said in the soft accents of his native language. "Do not waste the last sight of trees and stars and sky. Thees weel not be fon, like the day you shot the hat off the mayor's head. Thees weel be real and eet ees not moch fon to die."

THE SMOKE was creeping steadily up the swale and was almost to the first Reen guard post.

"There are ten of us that Martin wants dead or alive," Clayton said. "One, Doc, is already dead. So the seven of us from the *Space Hound* will go in the try for the ship, plus Mendivel and King, plus Dennison, Angelo, Schmidt..."

He named the twenty who would go, leaving twenty-four to remain on the knoll under the leadership of Gilbert and supply the cover fire. The un-

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spoken belligerence of the McDonald twins increased when they were not included among the twenty who would make the try for the ship. They went with the others to take up the positions Gilbert desired for them, however, with no more than a baleful stare in Claton's direction.

The twenty of them were left alone, with Doris and Gail still standing off to one side.

"I suppose," Al said, "the Reens aren't using their ship's guns to wipe out the city the easy way, because the Galactic Federation might think that was going a little too far. By using their ground forces, the odds are all in their favor; yet they can claim it was a fair battle and that the Terrans attacked first."

"Incident very regretful but Reens must protect selves," Red said. "They would use the ship if they saw they were going to lose, though. They've gone too far to back out now."

"I know," Clayton said. "It looks as if the city is lost, one way or another, unless we get that ship."

STEVE LOOKED up toward the ship and the Reen guards that stood between. "There are a lot of guards," he said, very matter-of-factly. "It will be a good try, but I don't think we'll quite make it."

"If not," Whitey said, "we'll get a good sandwich while they're having a full meal."

"If we do get the ship," Steve said, "we wipe out the Reen forces and save the city before we go. Then we depart forever into the starry void of space, martyred heroes, leaving Martin to be gnawed by his conscience. If we don't get the ship, Martin's conscience will do him no gnawing for what happened to us in the trying. One way our role is pathos, the other way it's only pathetic."

The sound of battle was drawing farther away as the Reen column drove deeper into the city. The fire in Old Town was not burning as furiously as before, but the smoke was denser, spreading out as far as the knoll where they stood and dulling the light of the flare. The Reen camp to the north was half hidden by the smoke with the denser portion of the smoke slowly approaching it.

"It's about time," Clayton said.

Doris came back, to stand beside Johnny, but Gail remained where she was.

"I wish you would wait here, Doris," Johnny said. "Wait here until we have the ship."

Doris smiled at him, serenely, her composure back again. "Let's be practical, Johnny. I married you be-

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cause I wanted to be with you, no matter where you went."

"Then stay behind me all the way," he said.

WHITEY rubbed his hands restlessly and looked up at Orion, dim through the haze of smoke. "A hundred yellow suns, they say. We should have done this before, Clay, instead of wasting the years here on Freia."

"We let them take our ship away from us," Al said. "We should have know, when they did that, that our job was done."

"The *Space Hound* was a good ship," Red said. "It carried us a long way. But that Reen ship has a faster drive —a drive as fast as the *Constellation's*. It's not far to those yellow suns when you have a ship like that."

Clayton saw that Gail was listening the rifle sagging a little as she held it and her eyes dark-shadowed in the flare's light as she stood alone outside the group and heard them talk of the suns she would never see. She straightened when she saw he was watching her and went over to stand beside Doris, to try to appear as composed as Doris and not quite succeeding.

He took a last look at the fighting in the city, the red funeral pyre of Old Town, the dim outlines of the Reen garrison. The swale was completely hidden from view but for the extreme upper end.

"By the time we arrive, the smoke will be there," he said. "It's time to go."

PROGRESS was swift up the swale at first, with the smoke to hide them and the deep grass to muffle any sound they might make. Clayton and Whitey were in the lead, according to plan, with Red, Al, and Steve close to their right flank and the others spaced behind. There was no resistance until they came to the end of the grass and the first Reen guard. The guard swung up his rifle, mouth open to call the warning, and the beam from Clayton's gun doubled him over with a twittering gurgle. A guard farther on saw the flash of the gun, and his whistle sounded in frantic warning. There was a quick gabbling of orders, then the winking of the Reen guns as they were fired blindly into the smoke.

"*Now!*" Clayton called to Johnny behind him and Johnny fired the shot with his rifle that would be the signal to Gilbert.

There was a deep snarling of rifles on the knoll as Gilbert's men opened up with the cover fire and a rumbling and thumping from the area in front of the Reen command building.

"We'll circle to the left," Clayton said to Whitey, and

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they began the charge. Reens met them, dim shadows in the smoke, their beams stabbing at them and furrowing the ground with harsh ripping sounds. The other shadows were coming up from behind, running with blue flames lancing out toward the Reens, sometimes falling and leaving on less gun to meet the Reen fire.

THEY BROKE through the outer guards and swung to the left when they reached the danger zone of the atomic rifle barrage, the ones behind them no longer visible. There was little opposition—two guards running toward the battle from around a corner, the startled expression on their faces dissolved by blaster beams into nothing before they could fire. Then another pair of guards, warned by the deaths of the first pair, and a brief exchange of beams.

Clayton saw a red gash ripped along Whitey's cheek and felt a beam flick through his hair. It was over within seconds, with the guards down and the way clear for them. They came to a door that looked large enough to be one leading to the commander's office and went through it into a short corridor. There was a louder rumbling sound outside as they did so and it was evident that some of the rifle fire had been over-enthusiastic and caved in part of the front of the building.

They went up the corridor in silence, and when they reached the door at its end they could hear voices coming from beyond it. Clayton recognized one as the high-pitched voice of the commander and he nodded at Whitey, smiling. Whitey smiled back, the blood on his face accenting the eager anticipation in his pale eyes.

THE DOOR opened quietly and they stepped through, to stop just inside. There were three Reens in the room; the commander, standing with his back to them and listening to the reports coming in through a communicator, and two sub-officers who stood near him and were talking rapidly into other communicators.

A fourth communicator beeped urgently and an excited Reen voice came through it. The sub-officers jerked up their heads at the words and they and the commander wheeled in unison, to freeze at the sight of the leveled guns.

"Don't make a single twitter or it will be your last," Clayton said. "And speak only in Terran."

The voice was still coming through the communicator that had beeped in urgency, seeming to be asking for some kind of acknowledgement.

"I think that must be the officer in charge of the

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guards," Whitey said, "asking his commander to please lock the back door or something. He called a little late."

"Step this way," Clayton said to the Reens. "Away from those communicators."

They obeyed, but their first dismay changed into near confidence as the firing outside dwindled suddenly to a few scattered shots and then stopped.

"You will drop weapons at once," the commander ordered, "or face consequences."

"We will?" Whitey asked.

The commander's wattles reddened. "Guards have turned back foolish attack. Soon will note silence and enter. Will kill very painfully if finding commander prisoner."

"We came for your ship," Clayton said; "you're going to order your men out of it and go with us into it."

"*Ship?*" The commander's voice was an incredulous gobble. "Take ship—take ship? Are insane! How can take ship?"

THERE WAS the sound of running footsteps coming down a corridor; not the quick, short-legged steps characteristic of the Reens but the long strides of Terrans. Red and Al swung open the front door of the office, then lowered their guns at the sight of himself and Whitey.

"The others were mopping up the last of the guards when we left," Red said. "Do they"—he nodded toward the Reens— "know what they're going to do?"

The Reens exchanged quick glances and the commander spoke again, threateningly: "For last time, demand that weapons be dropped. Is war with Reen victory certain. If not obey, will be quickly captured by victorious Reen soldiers and executed very slowly."

"The three of you can go ahead and take care of this end," he said in answer to Red's question. "I want to see how things are going in the city; and tell Martin we'll soon be ready to lend him a hand with the ship before we go."

"Cannot take ship!" the commander shrieked. "Cannot force to give orders!" The little reptilian eyes glared at Clayton. "Is war with Reen victory certain and consequences for you very slow and painful. You failing to understand situation!"

It struck him as mildly amusing that the Reen's words should be almost exactly those of Supervisor Martin; that he, Clayton, should forever be trying to alter situations he was not credited with understanding.

"Persuade him," he said to Whitey. He went to the door and stopped to say, "Not

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enough to keep them from being able to show us how to operate their ship, of course."

"Of course," Whitey agreed and he and the other two stepped forward to the Reens.

He heard the Reens bluster in threatening defiance as he started down the corridor, heard the defiance change to moans when he was halfway to the outside door, and heard the moans become the first yelping gobbles of pain as he stepped out into the smoky, flare-lit night.

GAIL WAS coming toward him through the rubble in front of the building, a gun in her right hand and her left arm hanging limp from the paralysis. There was a red smear of dirt on her face; her clothes were torn and she was limping from a bruised knee.

"Johnny didn't make it," she said. "And Steve didn't, and Chuck and Jimmy. The McDonald twins came with us, anyway; one of them is dead, and the other one badly hurt. And Mendivel and King were killed when it was almost all over with."

"How about the others?"

"Some of them are hurt, but not too bad," she answered, and then asked, "The ship—will we get it?"

"In a few minutes. They're talking the commander into the notion, now."

She followed him as he went on past the rubble and to the piper tree that stood on a slight elevation beyond. He saw that Mike Shannon and others had taken up guard positions around the building and were exploring the various doorways for possible hidden Reens. Everything was strangely quiet after the sound of battle, with only the distant sound of the fighting in the city to break the quiet. The night breeze was freshening, making the leaves of the piper tree sing like a thousand tiny fairy flutes. It moved some of the mass of smoke aside as he watched and exposed the city.

A CHANGE had taken place there. The Terran forces had closed in behind the Reens and the Terran fire was much heavier than it had been before. One tank was lying in wreckage in the city and the other was lumbering back toward command headquarters. It was apparent why the city had put up such ineffectual resistance during the first part of the attack: it had been planned to allow the Reens to drive far enough into the city so that they could be surrounded and cut off from any return to their garrison.

Old Town still burned, but the flames were not as high as before nor was the smoke from its burning as dense. The breeze was slowly moving the smoke out of the

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swale as its direction shifted, making visible the still figures lying there and the things that no longer had human shape.

"Doris is down there with Johnny," Gail said. "She—I guess she wasn't as practical as she thought. She was holding Johnny's hand and talking to him and she didn't seem to see me or hear me at all when I spoke to her."

The returning tank lurched to a stop halfway between Gilbert's men and where he stood. Clayton presumed that its crippled drive had finally quit completely. But its presence blocked Gilbert and the others from reaching the ship, unless they detoured through the spaceship field to the west. Atomic rifles were powerful, but not powerful enough to penetrate the thick and resistant alloy of a Reen tank's armor plate.

He gave Gilbert the "Come on" signal, not wanting for any time to be lost waiting for them, and a few seconds later he saw them moving out toward the spaceship field.

THE AIRLOCK of the Reen ship slid open and a dozen bewildered Reens stepped out. Whitey and the others appeared from behind the building, hurrying the commander and his sub-officers before them.

"All right, Mike," Clayton called. "We have the ship."

The word was relayed around the building to the others: "Come on—we have the ship!"

Gail watched them all go into the ship, taking the Reen crew with them, disappearing inside and leaving the empty airlock, waiting for those who would soon follow.

"It's not like I thought it would be," she said. "Now that it's over, everything is so quiet, and Johnny and Steve are gone, and Doris is down there crying..."

Something twinkled like a star in the west, shining where no star had been before. He watched it and saw that it moved; knew it would be the *Space Hound* coming in, far ahead of schedule.

He pressed the activator button of the police communicator and the connection with Martin was made at once, as though Martin might have been waiting for him to call.

"We have the Reen ship," he said. "I was going to offer you the help of our ship's guns before we left but I see a ship coming in now. That's the *Space Hound*, isn't it?"

"IT IS," Martin answered. "Your offer of assistance comes a little late. We no longer need it. We anticipated your actions; that you would try to seize the ship and insure your own escape while we were fighting in the

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city. So the *Space Hound* has orders to prevent that Reen ship from leaving Freia."

"You paint us a little too black, Martin. We didn't intend to leave without first offering our help."

"None of your past actions have indicated any regard for the welfare of others," Martin said, and Clayton knew he had not been believed.

He estimated the time it would take the *Space Hound* to arrive and the time it would take Gilbert and his men to reach the Reen ship. He saw that the *Space Hound* would arrive too soon to permit waiting for Gilbert.

"Believe as you wish," he said. "I called you to ask another promise from you."

"Before you ask for favors from us, I suggest you review what you have done," Martin said. "Tonight you killed police and prison guards and involved us in a war that took an uncounted number of lives. That included women and children, Clayton—there wasn't time to completely evacuate the north end of the city, and women and children were forced to pay for your actions."

"I'm sorry about the women and children," Clayton said. "I laid no satanic plans that included their deaths. There is one thing you will have in return for what happened tonight: tomorrow, for the first time in six years, Freia's sun will rise on a world that's your own, with no Reen to gobble the tune you dance to."

"YES—THE larger aspects of the situation. The Reens will claim to the Galactic Federation that we violated the non-aggression pact and forced them to attack us in self-defense. The facts are such that we cannot say we were attacked unprovoked. We can only claim extenuating circumstances, and we have no reason to believe the Federation will consider our extenuating circumstances more important than the facts put forth by the Reens. At best, our position will be one of apologizing for the actions of our criminal element, of having to admit we failed to keep that element under control, and yet have been hoping to be considered a race mature enough to be admitted into the Federation."

"Why do you bother to tell all of this to a member of the criminal element?"

"Because you are—you were—an intelligent man. I wanted you to realize fully what you have done."

"I'm afraid we're still two blind men arguing about how an elephant is shaped. Now it's time for us to be going. You will find a girl under the piper tree just west of the Reen command building—the one who was shot with

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a sneak gun. I want you to see to it that she's taken care of. That's the one and only favor I have to ask of you."

"She will be given immediate treatment," Martin said. "As for you and the others I named: if you lift that Reen ship, the *Space Hound* will blast it into dust."

"Fair enough. And one last thing, Martin—*I* was the one who killed Delemar. Remember that in any future police investigations."

HE SWITCHED off the communicator and turned to the ship, where Whitey, or one of the others would be watching him in the viewscreen as they waited for him. He gave them the signal they had used so many times before with the *Space Hound: Danger—prepare for immediate take-off.*

A signal light high up on the ship blinked in quick acknowledgement and then came the first faint hum as the drives were set in preliminary operation.

Gail was watching him, her face pale and resolute with decision.

"Thanks, Clay," she said. "Thanks for trying to help me. But it wouldn't work."

"You don't want to die tonight, Gail."

"No, I don't want to die; I'm scared and I wish I could live. But I can't let you leave me— I can't stay here and be smothered in that prison-city through the endless years. Understand, Clay—if you go and leave me, you will take all my heart and soul with you. There must be drugs on the ship, maybe drugs like you would need for me. You could try.

The *Space Hound* was near the critical point after which escape for the Reen ship would be impossible. The hum of the drives was coming louder, higher, and the signal light on the bow was blinking: *Ready.*

"Now, Clay!" She tugged at his sleeve. "They're ready and it's time for us to go. Good-by to Freia, good-by to Johnny and Doris and Steve and all the others because we'll never see them again. It's time for us to go—quick, before it's too late."

He laid his arm along her shoulders and said, "I'm sorry, Gail."

IN THE MOMENT before his fist struck the base of her jaw, she realized his intentions. She tried to throw up her hand and ward off the blow, her voice a forlorn, anguished cry: *"No!"* Then his fist struck her soft flesh and she went limp and still in his arm.

He lowered her to the ground and straightened her crippled arm so it would not be hurting her when she awakened, paused a moment to brush the smear of dirt from her face. Then he ran

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for the ship, its drives filling the night around him with their restless moaning and the *Space Hound* coming in like a meteor; remembering her as she lay like a little girl gone to sleep under the piper tree, and knowing the memory would go with him across all the worlds that waited beyond Orion.

FREIA SWUNG three times around its sun and the chief executive of Earth walked with Supervisor Martin in the Administration Area Park of a larger Greendale. The stars glittered overhead, with Orion at its zenith, silhouetting the ships in the spacefield to the north: the tall *Constellation*, its new sister ship, the *Nebula*, and the little *Space Hound*. The chief executive and the colony supervisor passed by the fountain where an always-burning light shone on a bronze plaque and the words of Galactic Federation Representative Valkaron:

An intelligent and mature race is tolerant toward other, weaker, races and recognizes their right to live. But tolerance must be limited; it cannot be permitted to become meekness. To permit tolerance to become meekness is to face domination by races too immature to extend tolerance to those they have conquered. To permit tolerance to become meekness is to face extinction, for the universe does not have and will never have a place of refuge for those unwilling to fight to survive.

"It is ironic," the chief executive said, "that the actions of Clayton and the others, and the resultant actions of our own, should have been the key to admittance into the Federation while our conservative and carefully-thought-out program was one that would have made us ineligible. We should feel indebted to Clayton and his irresponsible men, I suppose, although"—the chief executive smiled musingly— "I feel it would be better for all of us if none of them ever returns."

"THEIR KIND never does," Supervisor Martin said. "A considerable change has taken place here on Freia, with the wildest of them gone and the site of their burned town appropriated by the city for a park area. There was some trouble, at first, with them. Especially with the ones who had intended to go with the Reen ship, and were prevented from doing so by the arrival of the *Space Hound*. There were outbreaks of violence, defiance of the law, and even rumors of plans to steal the *Space Hound* and follow the others to Orion. Firm action by the police eventually quieted them all down and

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now Greendale grows as a city should grow, steadily, peacefully."

"You might say that the wild ones were the catalyst we needed to produce the desired reaction with the Reens," the chief executive said. "But now our formula" —he smiled again— "is balanced and satisfactory. I trust you have seen to it that there is no possibility the no-longer-needed catalyst can intrude into it again?"

"I have," the supervisor said. "They are being kept under strict vigilance and control."

"And the *Space Hound?*" the chief executive asked. "I understand it was retired from the moon run two and a half years ago and has remained unused there in the field since then. Do you keep it well guarded?"

"A token guard, to avoid any suspicions on their part. The *Space Hound's* drive was secretly dismantled, shortly after its retirement, during the period when there were these rumors of stealing it. Should they suffer another outbreak of wanderlust and kleptomania, they will find we have quite effectively foreseen and forestalled their intended departure."

The chief executive nodded in satisfaction and looked up at Orion. "A wise precaution," he said. "This is only the beginning of our galactic expansion and it must proceed in an orderly, efficient manner. There in Orion will lie our next objective when the proper time comes: virgin, untouched worlds waiting for us, with no more than the bones of Clayton and his men to interfere in the establishment of our peaceful, orderly society. And bones lie quietly, do not resist the will of Society."

THE PIPER tree was singing in the starlight, as it had sung to her the flare-lit night when her world had ended for her. She stopped beside it and let the others pass her; Pop and Glen and Maynard, the Clinton sisters and the Angelo sisters, Jerry McDonald and Blacky Varish, Julia King and the Johnson boys...

There was a long column of them; she felt her heart beating hard with the fear they might be seen before they reached the ship. The last of them passed her and she fell in with the other rear guards; going with them onto the hard surface of the landing field, hearing the singing of the piper tree fading away behind her, in her right hand a gun, and under her left arm the books she had stolen for them with such ingenuity two years before: *"Star Systems Of Orion"* and *"Flight Operation Of The Cruiser 'Constellation.'"*

★

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THE BETTER EGG

Novelet by Dick Hetschel

illustration by MURPHY

The grocery store was selling something new, "hormonized" eggs, bigger eggs than you ever dreamed of buying before. Only Norman Estes was an expert—he could see that no chicken had ever laid such an egg!

NORMAN ESTES plumped himself down at the table without missing a syllable of his victory chant.

"...without a doubt, honey, without a doubt the most exact, the most exhaustive compendiun of the knowledge that we, as human beings, have ever assembled on the subject. Professor Wundt's

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eyes really will bulge when he sees it." As Estes spoke, his own eyes shone with an inner light that Wilma Estes found beautiful to behold.

Wilma sighed. "And thank goodness it's done at last. I think I've worked harder than you, worrying whether you'd ever get it finished. How are your eggs, honey?" Wilma was surprisingly pretty for the wife of a lean, hungry-looking assistant instructor in Zoology. She had the kind of prettyness, not exactly beauty, that does not look out of place and loses none of its charm in an apron.

"They're delicious! Yes, it's late, all right. The department will be expecting something special, but they're going to get it, too. Imagine! Why, my section on the North American bird eggs along would be an excellent master's thesis in itself. And my study of the evolution of the egg! Complete! honey, complete. Absolutely as far as human knowledge has penetrated!"

WILMA TRIED to look properly impressed. She actually *was* impressed a little, but maybe not quite "properly" impressed. "And speaking of eggs, sugar, as we do so often, is the one you're eating now up to par?"

He shovelled another forkful into his mouth. "Every bit as good as usual. You're as brilliant a master of egg cookery as I am of egg study. It's delicious!"

"But doesn't it seem unusual in any way?"

"Unusual?" He studied the piece on his fork. "You mean texture? amount it's fried? color? way it's seasoned? elasticity? No, it seems perfectly ordinary." He popped it into his mouth. "Tastes same as usual, too. Good! I like eggs."

"Look at your plate!"

He looked at her a moment, then at his empty fork, then down at the plate.

"Yeee-eee-EEE! What the heck is it? Ostrich egg? No, that's *too* big. Let me think!"

"It's just a chicken egg, honey. Hormonized."

"Hormonized?"

"Uh huh."

He looked at the fried egg closely. It filled the plate completely, and it was a larger plate than the one on which she usually served his breakfast. "What do you mean it's hormonized?"

"That's what Mr. Abrogado at the grocery told me. Doesn't it make sense?"

"I don't know! I don't think so! At least I've never heard of such a thing. Wilma! Wilma! Do you realize what this means? My thesis! It's not complete! An entirely new development in eggs and no mention of it in my thesis!"

"Didn't any of those periodicals you read mention it?"

"No, not a word. That *is*

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strange!" He stood up suddenly. "Why, how could you possibly serve the egg to me like this? You..." he looked down into his plate "...you fried it! You ruined it! Can we get another? Do you...? Suppose we can't get another?"

WILMA GOT up and went over to the cupboard. "I thought you might be interested. I got two." She held it up for him to see.

He made a grab for it. "Dark! Greater luster than a hen's egg! Fully three times the volume. Maybe four. Could be five, but I don't think so. I've got to study this, honey. Call the department! Tell I'll need a substitute for my eleven o'clock lab."

Wilma folded her arms. "Oh, no, you don't! That thesis is due in at noon today and you know what they said. No more extensions, and no more cutting classes; that's your responsibility, Norman. They can't get a new instructor to replace you every few days. You've got about an hour before you have to get ready! Do what you can in that time!"

"Well, I'll try." He dashed up the stairs toward the small laboratory he had established in a corner of the bedroom. "But it's not going to be enough time, I can tell you that now!"

IT WAS NOT an hour, but a mere forty minutes later that Norman came back down.

"Baking, eh? Smells good!" He drew himself up to his full five feet ten. "I have news for you. That is *not* a chicken egg! Not a hormonized chicken egg and not any other kind of chicken egg! It is no more like a chicken egg than a robin egg is like a chicken egg!"

"OK., you're the eggspert around here; I believe you. What is it then?"

"Before I answer that, let me remind you again that I do not like puns. Especially puns about eggs and me. All day on the campus it's puns. 'Eggzactly.' 'How are your eggsperiments going?' I'd like my home to be a refuge from things like that.

"But to answer your question; I haven't the slightest idea what kind of egg it is!"

"What!"

"I will go further; definitely, it is not related closely to any other egg I have ever studied. Its differences are so great, in fact, that, judging by the egg, I feel sure the bird that laid it cannot be placed in any known order of the bird family!"

"Order? That's the classification above class and below family, isn't it? Why, that's impossible! It must belong to *one* of the orders."..

"It's the classification *below* class and *above* family, but it's still impossible. Even

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if a representative of an extinct family had laid the egg, we should have some record of its ancestors in the geological record; that is, if extinct representatives could lay eggs and if extinct families had representatives and ... Did Mr. Abrogado actually *tell* you they were hormonized eggs or did you just assume that?"

"He said it! He said it! I'm sure of it! He pointed them out to me as something special, and there was even a sign above them that said so. They cost 39c apiece, too."

"Well, chicken eggs could never be changed like that. Call the department!"

"CALL THE department? Oh, no! You take that thesis just as it is and go teach your lab. It's time you got ready, too."

"Come to think of it, I'd better call them myself. They were kind of nasty about it last time, weren't they?"

"They said once more and they'd have to cancel your fellowship award for next semester!"

He dialed the number while she stood by anxiously.

"Hello? Professor Waldteufel? Oh, hello; this is Estes. Well, yes, but... Well, you see... It's an emergency. But it's an emergency. Yes, a *real* emergency. Yes, well...uh. Uh huh. But... You see... My wife is having a baby! Yes, a baby. Oh, yes we were! Yes, it's sooner than we expected; caught us by surprise. Uh huh. Well, I'll be in tomorrow sure. My thesis, too. You bet; goodbye.

"You see, honey; nothing to it."

"And exactly what did you tell them!"

"No sense getting mad; just a little white lie. I've already told them *I* had everything from acinaciformosis to xenophobia and I had to say something."

"And how do you expect to explain that to him later?"

"Oh, I'll think of something." He was slipping on his coat. "Well, goodbye, honey; I'll be back soon."

"Where are you going? And you haven't shaved!"

"Haven't time. I'm going to find out where those dam' eggs are coming from!"

ABROGADO'S GROCERY is at the corner of 16th and Michigan streets. It's a little larger than the average neighborhood grocery, perhaps, but is still definitely no *more* than a neighborhood grocery. Norman had been there several times before when, for one reason or another, the household shopping had devolved upon him.

This was too important, though, for a direct approach. Mr. Abrogado might have some reason to keep

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silent about where he got the eggs. Just possible, if there *was* something funny about them. He stared at the displays through the window for a while, trying to remember what part of the store was reserved for eggs.

When he finally went in, he idled around the store a while before he closed in, picking up a few odd items, some coffee, a tooth-brush, a couple of bags of cookies. Then he s l a p p e d a rigid c o n t r o l on himself and turned toward the eggs.

He could scarcely resist c r y i n g out. There they were! Two large eggs resting in the bottom of a wire box and above them a sign that proclaimed:

SPECIAL
Hormonized Eggs
42c apiece

He picked one up—best not to appear too eager—and took it over to the counter with the rest of the items he had chosen.

ONE OF MR. ARBOGADO'S sons waited on him, to his intense disappointment. He had tried to time it so he would be next when Mr. Abrogado was free.

He tried to appear nonchalant as the boy checked off the items, but his head was in a whirl. *He h a d n ' t p l a n n e d t h i s carefully enough! He didn't know what to say!*

Mr. Abrogado saved the day for him. "Good morning, Mr. Estes; isn't your wife feeling well this morning?"

Norman spun around, uncertain at first who had spoken. He was shaking and he tried hard to control himself.

"Mr. A b r o g a d o! Good morning...no, she's a little under the weather the eggs —no—yes, yes the eggs you see." His manner became confidential as he gently elbowed aside the customer Mr. Abrogado was serving, "The eggs, you see, these eggs, the big ones; I'm afraid thy didn't agree with her."

"Oh, that's too..." began Mr. Abrogado, looking a little worried.

"She's allergic to...corn, you see, and we thought maybe these chickens had been fed corn. I thought maybe I could find out so we'd know what to do for her—two kinds of pills, you know, and we're not sure which ones to take. Do you know maybe what they were fed?"

"Why, no, I..."

THIS WAS his opening, and Norman's eyes went wild as he leaped in. "Then maybe I could get in contact with the people that laid them...with the c h i c k e n s who owned the...with the

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people that had the eggs that the chickens..."

"Is she very sick, Mr. Estes?" asked Mr. Abrogado gravely, noticing how flustered Norman was.

"Yes! Well, pretty much; at least I'm kind of worried. It's the...you see...she's having a...no! no! I don't mean... It's just that...just a little allergic reaction, you know, but it makes her feel pretty miserable, you know."

"Of course. Well, I wish I could help you, but I guess the best I can do is give you the name of the distributor that brought us the eggs. He should be able to help you some." Mr. Abrogado opened a little book and copied an address from it. "Or maybe it would be best to just phone. You could..."

"No, no, this is fine!" Norman grabbed the slip of paper.

"Mr. Estes! Come back! Your package! Well, I'll be darned! I guess we'd better deliver it; did he pay you Joe?"

II

THE DISTRIBUTOR had a downtown address, but as the town was not large (the college being its main industry), downtown was only a few blocks away. Norman Estes already had the car out, though, and he got as close to the main street as he could find a parking spot. He left the motor running—on the slight chance that he might have to make a quick getaway upon leaving the distributor—and headed toward the address Mr. Abrogado had given him.

The place was one he had passed many times but had never particularly noticed. An office in the front of the building was all he could see from the street, though there was a wide driveway beside it of the type that heavy delivery trucks used.

He paused a moment outside. Would information be his for the asking, or would the distributor try to cover up? Everything was probably on the up-and-up—but then, maybe the process was secret, or perhaps there was something illegal about it. After all, they did call the eggs "chicken eggs" and they were nothing of the kind. Norman didn't have much time, and he knew he couldn't possibly put off the thesis a day longer. He should have mapped out a plan of action in advance—but on the other hand, he always seemed to do his best thinking on the spur of the moment. Right now his mind was empty. He opened the door and went in.

"Good morning," said a black-haired woman who appeared to be about 45 and had a sort of unmarried look. She was seated behind a typewriter.

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"Good morning," said Norman; "I'd like..."

"Is that Wally?" shouted a heavy voice from a room somewhere in back.

THE LADY behind the typewriter looked at Norman apologetically, obviously feeling it improper for a lady to raise her voice in a shout. "No," she called, then looked at Norman apologetically again, pursing her lips slightly in a gently irritated manner.

The voice roared back. "Well, when he gets here ask him where the hell he's been all this time and what kind of a damn place he thinks this is!"

The lady behind the typewriter made a visible mental note of the message and turned back to Norman. "And what can we do for...?"

"Who the hell *is* out out there?" called the voice again.

The lady behind the typewriter looked distressed. "Did you wish to see Mr. Cuddy?" she asked Norman hurriedly, getting up from the chair.

Norman nodded.

She hurried to the back of the building, leaving Norman alone for the moment.

PLANS, PLANS, plans; he had to think of something. Mr. Cuddy sounded as if he might be a difficult man to deal with. And if there *was* something shady behind it all..."

"Mr. Cuddy will see you."

Mr. Cuddy matched his voice; heavy black hair, heavy black beard already poking out into view before noon, hulking shoulders, gigantic hands, gigantic feet placed solidly on a wooden desk. "Well, what do *you* want?"

He's probably good-natured—this is just his manner, thought Norman, trying to get his brain working.

"It's about eggs..." he began weakly.

"Well, you've come to the right place!" Mr. Cuddy said sarcastically.

"...about eggs. I...we have a problem. We..."

Mr. Cuddy blew his nose violently. I don't believe he's even listening, thought Norman worriedly. "We're ...we're having some trouble with one of your eggs."

THAT MADE Mr. Cuddy look up, at least.

"One of the big ones—one of the hormonized ones; it's ..." Norman thought desperately "...it's hatching!"

Mr. Cuddy's feet left the desk and his throat made a noise a little like a bird-call. "Hatching!"

"Yes, we don't know what to do about it."

"Hatching!"

"Yes—we're worried. We don't know what a hormon-

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ized egg will turn into; they're so big and all. I think I should get in touch with the people who...hormonize them."

Mr. Cuddy looked him squarely in the eye, obviously wondering whether he could have any possible reason for lying. "They're hatching?"

"Just *one* of them," corrected Norman, beginning to feel better. He felt he had hit upon the right course.

"That just ain't possible!"

"I know...but one is!" Norman had him in a corner, and knew it.

"We got nothing to do with it. We just handle them." Mr. Cuddy stated flatly.

"Oh?" Best not to press too hard; Mr. Cuddy was moving in the right direction.

"It's none of our business—you'll have to see the guy we get them from. Sam will know about that."

Norman kept his mouth shut—waiting expectantly.

"We get them from an old guy way out somewhere. I don't know where. You'll have to ask Sam."

The feet were back on the desk and Mr. Cuddy picked up a newspaper and began shuffling through it. Apparently the interview was completed. Norman walked back to the outer office where the secretary was busily typing. "Who's Sam?" he asked.

SAM BURNS lived in a pleasant section of town near the river. The house—green and white and shaded by several tall trees, each of a different variety—was enough to give Norman a pang of jealousy; he, an egg expert, Sam, an egg distributor; he, a three-room apartment, Sam, this! He shrugged his shoulders and went up the walk.

The woman who answered the bell was red-faced, middle-aged and a little on the weighty side, and he felt better. "Is Sam home?"

"No, he's working."

"Could I get in touch with him?"

"He don't get home till six."

"Well, this is urgent; I'd like to contact him now."

"Sam don't like to be bothered when he's working. What do you want?"

Norman thought fast, rooted around a moment, and suddenly inspiration struck. "Mr...." what was the name of that...? "Mr. Cuddy sent me. It's about the lawsuit."

"Lawsuit?" Mrs. Burns looked puzzled and slightly worried.

"Yes. Someone's suing about those hormonized eggs, the big ones. Mr. Cuddy wants me to talk to Sam right away."

Mrs. Burns looked really worried now. "There isn't something wrong with them, is there?"

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NORMAN tried to look serious, too. "I think they were patented or something." Be as vague as possible and speak in a grave tone of voice, seemed to be the ticket here. Mrs. Burns looked like the worrying kind.

"I warned him about those eggs," she said. "I thought there was something about them. Lord, I don't know what we'll do if we have any more expenses; we're still trying to pay for the damage the [illegible] and Herby's teeth need fixing, and..."

"Sam?" interrupted Norman gently.

"...you'll probably find him at his warehouse on F street between Madison and Ellis. If he isn't there yet, wait and he'll show up."

Norman thanked her and turned to go, tripping over something on the porch behind him as he turned. He recovered his balance and looked down.

"This is Herby." Mrs. Burns explained.

"He kicked me," said Herby in a calm voice.

Norman liked children but was rather afraid of them. "I beg your pardon. I'm sorry," he explained as he hurried away, wondering where Herby had come from and how he had managed to get behind him so quietly.

SAM WAS already at the warehouse when he got there. He looked up for a moment at his question, "Yeah, that's me." He looked down again at the papers on the desk in front of him; almost as though, Norman thought, the one glance had been enough to convince him that his caller wasn't worth much attention. People often gave Norman that impression and it always embarrassed him and made him slightly angry.

"I'd like to speak to you a moment," he said rather weightily.

[illegible] look up from his papers, he was a severely drawn, slightly balding man. "I'm busy right now. Behind schedule. See me at my house tonight if it's important."

"It'll take just a moment."

"Umph," Norman could see he wasn't listening. This called for fairly desperately measures; if he got Sam irritated he'd never get his information. He thought of using the lawsuit idea again, but then noticed the telephone on Sam's desk. Sam would likely phone the downtown office, and then where would he be? If he could just get the guy away from his work for a few minutes he was sure he could talk...

Inspiration struck again. "It's about the flood." He recalled Mrs. Burns mentioning flood damage and remembered the trouble the river

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houses had had a few months back.

Sam looked up. "What about it?"

Norman was hitting his stride. "The water's rising again. Your wife told me to come get you."

Sam was startled now. "But it hasn't rained in weeks," he said in a "they can't do this to me" voice.

"Not here, but in the mountains," said Norman smugly. "And she can't find Herby. He's out playing somewhere. She wants you to come home right away."

Sam was up and getting his coat on. "My car's out in front and the motor's warm," Norman added. "I'll take you. Hurry!"

IN THE CAR, Norman worked quickly. "I'm from the health commission," he said as he drove, Sam Burns sitting nervously beside him. "I called at your home to see you and your wife sent me to you. We..."

"Hold it!" Sam interrupted him; "a couple of neighbors of mine work in this next block. Their homes'll be in danger, too. We'd better pick them up."

Norman cast a worried side-glance at him but he pulled the car to a stop and waited while Sam hurriedly collected a couple of mill workers. A few blocks further on they stopped to pick up a storekeeper and his son whose homes were also in the danger area.

The car was quite crowded as Norman took up where he had left off. "We have an epidemic on our hands, Mr. Burns." He said the word "epidemic" extra loudly and cast a side glance to see whether Sam reacted to it. He did. Norman hurried on. "Your company has some large eggs on the market—hormonized—and they're spreading something; we're not sure what. We've got to check the hens that lay them and find out what it is before anyone dies." he emphasized the word "dies" too. "If you'll give me the address you get them from, I'll be able to head there as soon as I drop you off. There isn't a moment to lose."

Sam was visibly shaken. "It's an old guy way out at the far end of Humphrey Lane. Only farm around there. He told me not to tell where I got them—it's something new he's still working on, he says, but... Do you think it's very serious?"

NORMAN mumbled a soft sentence with no real words in it. They were getting near Sam's house. Norman had carefully avoided river streets and he knew he dared go no further. He pulled the car up to a curb. "This is as far as I can go; can't turn around ahead because of the water."

The five men peered ahead. "I don't see any water yet,"

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objected Sam. "We're still three or four blocks from..."

Norman raced the motor. "You'd better hurry."

The five of them got out, Sam still mumbling something, and Norman turned the car around quickly and raced back the way they had come. He felt a pang of remorse. He had treated Sam pretty harshly; the poor guy seemed w r-ried sick. Still, think how good he'd feel when he got home and found there was no flood after all and there was nothing wrong with the eggs. Looked at that way, it didn't seem so bad. He started planning how he would approach the old guy at the end of Humphrey Lane.

III

HUMPHREY LANE gave up the ghost of respectability several miles from its end. As it wound higher into the foothills, the occasional farms were smaller, the crops thinner and the fences in wilder disarray. The road ended in a well forested area and the only mailbox in sight had the name "Morgan" scrawled across it in faded white paint. A trail led off into the trees between the mailbox and a big, red-lettered *"No Trespassing"* sign.

As he walked through the alternating shade and sunlight, Norman Estes tried to "set" the conflicting plans that had been running through his mind as he drove up. Morgan could be anything from a suspicious old recluse who had stumbled onto something unusual to a lone-wolf scientist hiding out to perfect a radical new development.

After much thought Norman decided upon a simple but daring method of operation. He would tell the truth! If Morgan was a recluse, he could awe him with his position at the University—pumped up a little, perhaps—and if Morgan was a scientist, he could make a strong scientist appeal.

In a way, Norman was a bit appalled by the plan—it seemed too direct and uncomplicated to work and he had never had much luck with the naked, screaming truth. Still, it seemed the best method for these particular circumstance.

He came out of the trees into a little clearing that reached up toward the hills. Scattered here and there were several buildings: a house, wooden and very small, a woodshed, a leanto that partly sheltered a vintage Ford, an outhouse, a large pen crowded with Plymouth Rocks, and an enclosed shed of undeterminate usage. He started in the direction of the last since the chicken pen seemed to contain no birds of unusual shape or dimensions.

Then he stopped short. There was a gentleman coming toward him and he had a shotgun! Norman hadn't given

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a thought so far to the possibility of personal danger; now he made up for lost time.

THE MAN said nothing until he was within easy conversing range. He was tall, thin, old, hawknosed, tanned, toughened and not particularly friendly of aspect. Tangled grey hair covered his head, a good deal of it standing straight up, but rather than relieving his harsh appearance it only added to it a feel of electrical energy.

"See my 'No Trespassing' sign?" he asked conversationally, shotgun under his arm where it would just need raising a little.

"Yes, sir," said Norman, "but I have business with a Mr. Morgan."

The gun did not waver and none of the unfriendliness disappeared. "That's me."

Norman could feel his method was not going to work and he wanted to kick himself for not having something better planned. He was afraid to ad-lib now, for fear of striking a false note with that gun so handy. "I'm from the University," he said, his sudden and sick loss of enthusiasm showing so clearly in his voice that even he noticed it; "I'm doing a research on eggs for my master's thesis and understand you've made some sort of new development in the field." And there it was, stark and naked and unconvincing. Norman felt sick with disgust.

Mr. Morgan left no possibility of Norman welcoming truth to his breast as a newfound ally. "I'm sorry, mister, but somebody's been kidding you," he said matter-of-fact-ly, "I haven't developed anything. Looks like you better turn back the way you came. I've got work to do and can't afford to have people prowling around and maybe stealing things." The shotgun made a final little gesture back toward the trail and the look on its master's face advised against further talk.

Norman thought desperately for a moment. Then, no ideas coming forth, he turned wearily back the way he had come.

IT TOOK only a few steps away from his prize, though, to bring back to him the urgency of his mission, and with it came a rush of desperate energy. He turned around suddenly. Mr. Morgan...!"

Mr. Morgan was still standing on the trail watching him, shotgun under his arm.

"Mr. Morgan," Norman stumbled on, "I'm afraid I lied to you. I'm here on an important mission and I was told to feel you out before telling you about it—to be sure you were honest and that I would get your cooperation." He was perfecting his new idea as he spoke.

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"Well?" asked Morgan.

"I know that the large 'hormonized' eggs do come from here," Norman got that out of the way quickly—it was touchy work telling a man with a shotgun that you know he's lying— "though I certainly don't blame you for trying to keep them a secret and not letting everyone know about thm who comes barging onto your land. I... we got in touch with the distributor and he told me they came from here.

"Actually, I'm from the Sanitary Commission." He worked to put authority into his voice. "I've been sent to check on whether your 'hormonized' eggs are connected with a sort of epidemic we're having down in town." He paused. "Er...I'll have to ask you to let me examine the...hens that laid those eggs."

MORGAN thought for some time before answering. "If I get you right," he said finally, "you're worried that it's because they're hormonized and different from other eggs that they might of caused something?"

Norman nodded, almost eagerly.

"Then I guess I can't help you," the old man went on; "there's nothing unusual about the eggs when they leave here. It's the guy that picks them up that does something to them after he gets them. He was telling me about it. He must of got scared when you told him about the epidemic and sent you here on a wild goose chase while he covers up. You better get back to him quick."

Norman sagged suddenly, feeling very tired. He knew the old man was lying. His investigation of the one egg had proved to his complete satisfaction that the eggs were not, and had never been chicken eggs. But he had discarded his first story—he was no longer an egg expert —what could he say?

He stared blankly at the old man for a moment, trying to think. "Better get back to him quick!" Mr. Morgan repeated, making a seemingly unconscious motion with the shotgun as he spoke. Norman's heart began slowly to break in two. He just *had* to find out...

SUDDENLY his mind started working again. "I may as well get down to brass tacks. I'll have to confess I was just feeling you out," he began, the light growing in his eyes as he talked—what did a shotgun mean when he was inspired! "But I think we can make a deal. Actually, I'm not from the Sanitary Commission at all. I used to work for Sam Burns, the guy who collects the eggs from you—so I know he really gets the hor-

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monized eggs from you and doesn't do anything to them h i m s e l f—though I don't blame you for doubting my story and trying to send me off the track." He took a deep breath. "And now I'd like to talk business!"

"I've quit Sam's company and I'm starting out on my own and I'd like to handle your eggs myself, especially the big ones. I'll pay you a lot more—Sam has been gypping you right along—and ...well, I'm sure we can do business t o g e t h e r—to our mutual satisfaction..."

"Yeah?" The man didn't seem overly impressed.

"The only thing is," Norman hurried on, "I'd like to take a quick look at the chickens—just a glance—to see that they're healthy—that they're not laying such big eggs because they're sick or something. I can pay you a lot more," he added, noting again the unconvinced look in the other's eye.

MR. MORGAN thought silently again for a good period of time. "I'm sorry," he said at last; "my wife died yesterday and she was the one that fed those chickens; it was all in what she fed them and she never would tell me. Too damn bad she died." His eyes gazed heavenward a moment and Norman had to adopt a reverent look, too, though he was sure there was not a word of truth in the old man's speech. After all, he *knew* the eggs hadn't been laid by chickens. And the shack up the side of the hill looked as though it could never possibly have seen a woman's touch.

But there was nothing left to do but leave. Mr. Morgan still blocked the path and the shotgun was still held ready.

"Thank you," said Norman softly. "Goodbye."

Mr. Morgan said nothing, but Norman could feel the eyes on his back as he walked down the trail. One more chance...? How likely would the guy be to shoot?

He turned around.

"WELL? GOT another story?"

"Um...yes, sir. I...I may as well come clean this time. It's a personal matter and I was afraid you might not care to help me, but..."

Mr. Morgan said nothing, but a steely glint had come into his eyes.

Norman hurried on. "You see, my mother is sick and it seems to be one of those eggs that's the cause—not that there's anything wrong with them, but they just don't seem to hit her right. I ate some, too, and it didn't hurt me. But she's pretty old and she's very sensitive to some things and...well, I *am* actually a zoologist at the University and I've checked

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the eggs enough to know that these are not chicken eggs, so I know you must have some special kind of creatures to produce them and...well, I wonder if you could please let me see them and see what they eat and so forth so I can maybe tell what's wrong with my mother? It means an awfully great deal to us."

FOR THE next full minute Mr. Morgan weighed his speech, watching Norman closely the while, obviously trying to judge whether this last and somwhat impassioned plea could possibly have a grain of truth to it. Norman tried to look as humble and distressed as possible, but the decision apparently went against him.

"I'm darn sorry, really I am," the old man insisted, obviously trying to match the distressed sincerity that had been in Norman's voice, "but I found those doggone eggs in the woods—each day eight or ten of them in the same spot. Oddest thing. Never did catch a glimpse of the things that laid them; must of come out at night." He took a deep breath. "Then day before yesterday there were no more. Ain't been since. Guess they just moved on. I didn't tell you that when I thought you were from Sam because I been hoping the eggs would start coming again and I didn't want anyone else to get wise to them and steal them."

Norman looked desperately for a hole in the argument. He didn't believe a word of it, but... "Can I have a look in that one coop down there?" he waved toward the nearest one, "just to..."

The gun came up and looked him squarely in the eye. "You aren't calling me a liar?"

"No, of course not; I'm sorry," stammered Norman.

"Then get going!"

"But...but..."

Mr. Morgan aimed the gun and took a deep breath, seeming to Norman to expand to three times his normal size. "You've got ten seconds to get into those trees, and next time I see you I'll shoot on sight!"

Norman broke and ran.

NORMAN sat on the runningboard of his 1937 Ford, thinking, thinking. He looked up occasionally at the mailbox, and the *"No Trespassing"* sign, and the path that wound into the trees between them. He should give up, he told himself; it just wasn't worth the risk. But at the same time he knew he was not going to give up. He wouldn't have reached the position of Assistant Laboratory Instructor in Zoology if he gave up so easily when the going got

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tough. Besides, his curiosity had been thoroughly aroused and he knew his curiosity well enough to be sure it would never let him stop short of its satisfaction—especially where his specialty, eggs, was so immediately concerned.

The whole thing hinged on Morgan, of course. How could you handle a man like that? The man was an outrageous liar. Norman had never been up against anyone quite like him before. Still, he couldn't help admiring the guy—there was a sort of forthrightness to him; with the kind of persons who invariably tell the truth, you never can know what they might have up their sleeves.

THE SUN was low; it would be getting dark in about an hour. Could he do his best work in daylight, in dusk, or in the dark? It was almost half a mile back through the woods, so he chose daylight for the first part of the job, at least.

First he drove the Ford down the road a way, took it off into the trees and bushes far enough to hide it. Back at the road he marked to place carefully in his mind—it would be dark when he got back—and returned to the end of the road.

He decided, after a moment's thought, that it would be preferable to risk getting lost than to risk meeting Morgan on the trail, so he struck off into the woods somewhat to the left of the trail, trusting to the contour of the hills to guide him safely up the little valley.

The woods were thick and the shadows long, but he pushed ahead steadily, watching the ground carefully to avoid unnecessary noise. Once something large crashed into the bushes ahead of him and he stopped a few moments and listened carefully, moving even more cautiously when he started again.

He was thinking he had covered most of the distance and was straining to catch glimpses of the surrounding hills through the trees to orienate himself, when a sudden glance back at the ground stopped him in midstride.

At first it didn't fully register and he stood, one foot still raised, staring at the ground before him Then he was down on his knees.

Bird tracks! Large! Large! Too large for anything common to the vicinity! Could this be...?

ALL OF NORMAN'S woodsy lore came to the fore, and he quickly decided, after a moment's uncertainty as to which way a bird's claws pointed when it walked, that they had been coming from the direction of the hills to

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the left and heading toward the trail to the right.

Norman thought carefully. Would it be better to see where they were now, or check first where they had been? He fought down his impatience and decided to play it cautious; best to check back a little way and see if he could pick up any clues to their nature before he took a chance of coming upon them.

He started back along the trail, working to control his trembling. He had to remain calm, keep all his senses intact... He recalled Morgan's story of finding the eggs in the woods and wondered for a moment whether it could have been true. Still, it hardly seemed possible the old man would have gotten so liberal with the facts at the last moment.

Norman pushed on through the woods, feeling as though he were on the verge of a great discovery. Then, suddenly, as he brushed aside an overhanging branch and gazed under it...

IV

IT DIDN'T make sense at first. A little fire had sprung up, and the ground was burned for a small area before him: there was a big crumpled and blackened sheet of metal wrapped half around a tree-trunk to one side. Then he began to make out more and more shreds of blackened metal strewn throughout the burned area.

A wreck of some... Then his eyes caught something beyond the clearing and up in the air. A cloth blowing in the breeze! A pink-lavender cloth caught halfway up a tall pine.

He edged around the burned area and pushed through the underbrush, trying to keep his eye on the piece of cloth. It was further than he had imagined...

Then he was under the tree and looking up. A parachute? A parachute...? It certainly looked like one. A pink-lavender parachute! its straps released, its harness empty.

He searched the area beneath the tree. The tracks again! Just one set this time! He followed it until it joined another set that wound out of the woods. He followed the combined tracks until they reached the fringe of the burned area, where they were joined by others.

A plane wreck! A plane, perhaps a giant airliner to judge by the amount of metal strewn around, and crashed here, and some or all of the people in it had parachuted to safety.

But why did the people make tracks like birds?

A CHILL crept over him. It was beginning to get

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dark in earnest now and the gentle sounds of the wind made the woods seem very lonely. It was about suppertime, too. He sat a moment on a log to rest because he felt very tired, but it was getting dark so fast and he had no flashlight.

Soon he would not be able to follow the tracks! He got up and hurried back the way he had come, head low to make out the bird tracks and his own beside them. Soon his own tracks turned off, and, with a queer feeling in his stomach, he began following the bird tracks only.

Suddenly he stopped. He bent lower, then got to his knees, staring at the ground. A shoe track! Yes, and it joined the trail here! His own tracks had been left behind. Had... Morgan...?

He followed the combined tracks and suddenly came upon the main trail leading to Morgan's buildings. Here the bird tracks were virtually obliterated, as though the trail had been trod many times since their use of it; but here and there a telltale mark remained—leading up the valley toward Morgan's buildings!

NORMAN ESTES was trembling again. A really horrible feeling of depression had suddenly come over him. He felt as though he were acting out the next-to-last lines of a Greek tragedy, as though the whole world were closing in around him, ready to dump him into caverns deep under the earth. If the Ku Klux Klan had come marching out of the dusk ahead he could scarcely have felt worse.

But he was angry, too. What had happened? He scarcely dared think. What was Morgan...?

And gradually his anger at Morgan replaced most of the fear. Even the shotgun no longer seemed so formidable. It probably shot nothing but buckshot! What the hell was so bad about that?

He was walking fast as he came upon the clearing. He scarcely slowed down as he headed for the nearest coop, the covered one he had been unable to see into.

He stole just one quick glance toward the farmhouse as he went. A dim light burned in one dingy window; nothing was visible inside but a stretch of bare wall.

Then he was at the coop. The door to it was on the side nearest the house and he stole around to it quietly. There were no windows; he hated to try to open the door, but...

HE STOOD for a moment with his head against the wooden door, listening. No sound for a while, then a faint rustle that could have been a chicken moving.

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Or anything else moving, for that matter; he was learning nothing this way. The door was latched and padlocked and he fingered the padlock idly, trying to figure out what to do with it. He had been making little noises right along, he realized, but that couldn't be helped. He stole a glance back of him at the farmhouse but it hadn't moved.

He searched his pockets for something to work at the lock with. Handkerchief, car-keys, driver's license and draft-card, a few coins, a capsule of vitamin pills, a pencil stub. He thought of using a coin-edge as a file, but decided that couldn't possibly work. He tried the pencil stub as a pry and it broke in half with a dull pop. There seemed no other possibilities in his pockets.

He searched the ground. A long nail or something...

There was a sound behind him and a voice rang out. "Who's there!"

Norman spun around.

Morgan stood in the open doorway of the farmhouse, shotgun in hand.

NORMAN crouched back against the coop as Morgan peered out in his direction, trying to pierce the darkness. "Who the hell is that out there prowling around my henhouse?" the old man boomed; and Norman couldn't help thinking to himself what a corny statement *that* was. He chased an even worse answer out of his mind and hunted desperately for a deeper shadow instead.

"I see you!" Mr. Morgan exclaimed suddenly, and the shotgun came up and pointed directly at Norman to prove the point. "Come out here in the open! Who are you?"

Norman edged hesitantly away from the wall of the coop. His mind translated the words "I'm Norman Estes" into "I'm the guy you promised to shoot on sight" and he wasn't sure which came out.

"You're the one who was here this afternoon," Morgan suddenly realized, "telling all kinds of lies!" Norman could see his hands tighten on the gun.

With more desperation than courage, Norman suddenly got the control of himself he had been fighting for. "You might as well shoot," he said, his anger beginning to return; "I've got to find out something and I'm going to do it even if it fills me full of buckshot!" The words were braver even than he had intended and they gave him such a shot of confidence that he turned around immediately and walked back to the door of the chicken coop.

Morgan didn't fire.

And that inflamed Norman's courage even higher.

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"Come here and unlock this door," he ordered.

There was an ominous click behind him, and Norman spun to see the gun still levelled straight at him.

But Morgan wavered. "Let's talk this over. I'll give you a chance to have your say if you do it quick!"

NORMAN told his whole story from beginning to end, leaving out only his discovery of the parachute and certain of the more horrible of his fears as to what the whole thing meant. "And so you see," he finished, "this thing may well be a lot more important than either of us. I've got to find out more about these creatures, and I know you've got them hidden in that coop. What . . . what *are* they?"

Mr. Morgan sounded just a little more friendly. "Big chickens, son; biggest damn chickens you ever saw!" The old man had apparently been thinking things over while Norman spoke, and he went on: "You seem to know enough now, so you might as well know the whole thing—though I'm still not promising that you'll get away from here without a load of buckshot."

He lowered the gun a little and brought up one hand to scratch his neck. "There was a wreck, all right. About ten days ago. Something woke me up about four in the morning, roaring by overhead, and then there was a crash off in the woods. I went to see and got there about daylight.

"I found the place where it came down but it hit hard and there was nothing left. If there was anyone in it they were killed sure.

"THEN, ON my way back I ran into these critters, nine of 'em, real queer looking things—like chickens, but bigger. They were all colors—some were colored like ordinary chickens and others weren't like any color bird I've ever seen. And they had odd necks, longer than a chicken should have.

"But the strangest of all—they were wearing things! Had things on like pants, with suspenders up over their backs and collars up around their necks. Darndest thing!"

The old man paused. "Here's how I figure it out. The thing that crashed was a government rocket that was sent up the way they've been doing lately to see how high they can get, and the chickens were put in it to test how it would affect them up there. They were either not regular chickens to begin with—something the scientists developed special—or they got changed up there on their ride by rays or something. The clothes must have been put on to keep them warm at the high altitudes.

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"Well, something went wrong with the rocket and it crashed way out here. Only thing I can't figure out is how the critters got through the wreck without being killed.

"Anyway, they weren't afraid of me and followed me right back up to the house. Would of come inside with me if I'd let them."

"What...what did you do with them?" breathed Norman.

MORGAN looked a bit guilty. "Well, I figured at first on locking them up and then getting in touch with the government about its rocket, but I got no phone here and...well..."

"You *did* lock them up?" asked Norman, beginning to feel as terrible again as he had on the trail coming up. He edged a little away from the door of the coop.

"Yes, I coaxed them inside the coop—that one behind you—and then got out and padlocked the door. Used to keep a few setting hens in it but I took them out first.

"Then next day I went back to check up on them and feed them and I saw the eggs. I began to get ideas. When Sam Burns came up next to collect the regular eggs I showed them to him—just the eggs, not the chickens. Told him they were something new I was perfecting and he mentioned something about "hormonized" so I told him that was it. I guess that's the whole story."

"Did...how did they act? Norman felt as though he were talking from way down inside a deep hole, and his voice must have sounded sick, too, because Morgan glanced at him sharply.

"YES, THEY did," he answered. "They acted mighty odd. First day they set up an awful clamor, and next day when I went into the coop they kept doing all kinds of screwy things. Like flying up and down around my head and squawking like anything. Finally they all settled in a circle with one in the middle and it started making circles in the dirt with its claws..."

"Concentric circles?" gasped Norman, "one inside the other?"

"Yeah, and then all kinds of silly figures. I haven't paid too much attention—they've been doing it each time I go to get the eggs and feed them. That and all kinds of other crazy things. They've tried to dig out and break out and everything under the sun.

"They *really* acted crazy when I took the clothes off them. They..."

"You what!"

"When I took off those things they were wearing. I figured it wasn't good to

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leave them on now that they were out of the stratosphere. They acted like they didn't have any sense for a couple of days after that—cackling and running around the coop and hiding behind things and peeking out at each other. I was afraid something was wrong with them but they finally seemed to get used to it."

"Did..." Norman's mouth was dry and he had to swallow a few times to get his tongue working, "did the circles they drew have a dot in the center and was there a dot or a little circle somewhere on each of the big circles?"

"Yeah; something like that. How did you know?" Morgan was puzzled and curious.

"And did they draw a line from one of the littler circles to another one?"

"Yes; something like that. But what...?"

"DON'T YOU realize what that means?" Norman screamed. "They are from another planet! They are our first interplanetary visitors! That wasn't a stratosphere rocket; that was a spaceship!"

Morgan stared at him, dumbfounded. "By gosh, do...?"

"Don't you see? They were here to visit Earth—probably here on a peaceful visit—but their ship crashed and they got away with nothing but the clothes on their backs." Norman told him about the parachute he had seen. "The first extraterrestrial visitors the Earth has had, undoubtedly the emmisaries of some great, highly developed civilization—and you threw them into a coop and stole their clothes and sold their eggs and..." Norman couldn't go on.

The old man looked genuinely startled. "Darn it all, you may be right..."

Norman spoke suddenly. "We've got to do something! We've got to explain it! It may mean interplanetary war if we don't! We've got to give them an explanation; even," he swallowed, "even if we have to make one up!"

"You mean lie to them?" asked Morgan, beginning to look as worried as Norman.

"If necessary!"

Morgan looked him squarely in the eye. "Well, you ought to think up a good story. You were shooting them at me this afternoon thick and fast."

"And you seemed to know your way around at that sort of thing, too," reminded Norman, slightly bitterly. His face brightened suddenly. "Something about a quarantine station maybe. But no; that doesn't sound too good." His eyes grew desperate. "We've got to have some-

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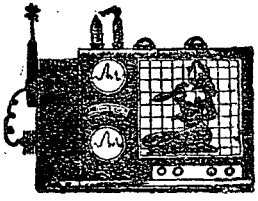
thing airtight—absolutely airtight!"

Morgan fished a hand in a pocket and came up with a key. "This will open the coop when we get ready," he said. "Come on inside and we'll have a cup of coffee and try to think up a good, strong yarn before we have to go explain things."



NEXT TIME AROUND

Every now and then, someone asks me what I think about psionics, flying saucers, and the like. Not that everyone who thinks that there's something in psionics is also a firm believer the saucers — reading from Ruppelt to Shaver — but the two do seem to be lumped together quite a bit.

On psionics, then: well, some follow the line of reasoning (fundamentally), "It *must* be true, because I want it to be true." Others say (in effect), "It *can't* be true, because I just couldn't bear it if it were."

My own feeling is that nothing that I've seen or heard about psionics leads me to believe that it is true — but I don't *mind* if it is. And as for the saucers, Ruppelt's book makes sense to me; hardly anything else that I've seen does. (But I'll admit to so small an interest that I haven't bothered reading very much on the subject.)

Which sort of leads into one of next issue's novelets. Donald Franson handles the subject in a very cogent manner, I think, in "The Time For Delusion."

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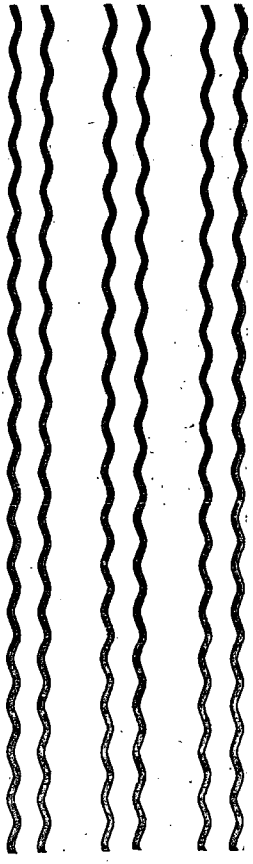

DEATH WISH

Novelet

by Nicholas G. Lordi

illustration by EMSH

It had been a mistake for Roy Falstun to come to Mars, a mistake when he married Linda, a mistake when they found and preserved the mysterious creature they called "Pincus"...

THE WIND had begun to rise. The first bursts of sand already sprayed the exterior of the station with grinding force. Falstun was unaware of the approaching storm. The electronic senses of the station recorded their warnings to no avail. Inside the sealing walls he lay sprawled near the body of his wife, amidst a puddle of viscous fluid littered with glassy fragments.

Falstun moved. His hands, slipping in the slime, pressed against the floor for support. He staggered to his feet and

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Falstun picked up the strange creature.

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stepped backwards out of the wreckage, his hands clutched to his throbbing head. He stared down at the floor through stained eyes. Between his feet lay the now-withered tissue, shapeless and quite dead. His eyes went no farther; they jerked away from the impossible haze which obscured his vision in the center of the room.

The odor of decay which permeated the room and drenched his body choked his nostrils. He turned. There, as always, Pincus stared out at him from the confines of its biome. Faithful Pincus. Mysterious Pincus...

A wild thought shot through his mind. It was insane. It was silly. His discomfort forgotten, he began to laugh.

"Last night I dreamed," he said aloud, "that I killed my wife."

MARS WAS a whirling globe on the top of Morrison's desk. The Co-ordinator of the Persephone Project's hawkish face studied Falstun with all the irreverence of a two-year old.

"Roy Conrad Falstun," he said. "Ph. D., geochemistry, Cal Tech, 1981. Married. No children. Brilliant thesis. Refused offer from Pacific Minerals in order to volunteer for the Persephone Project. A commendable action, considering the pay differential.

"You and your wife are lucky. The response to the project has been gratifying, the number of applications received exceptional. Again, my congratulations."

"Liar!" thought Falstun. They had been forced to accept his application, just as he had been forced to make it. He fidgeted; he felt uncomfortable in the plush seat. There was something wrong with the room. Behind him, an immense window looked down over the San Francisco Bay; in front of him, behind Morrison, an equally-immense mirror seemed to reflect an unreal image of his immediate environment. Perhaps it was only Morrison's annoying habit of tapping the edge of the desk with his knuckles which bothered him. More likely, it was his own feeling of inadequacy, which was particularly intensified in Morrison's presence.

Falstun's eyes fixed on the whirling globe. He watched as Morrison stopped Mars' motion with a flick of his wrist.

"An interesting terrain," said Morrison. "An appalling lack of mountains. Be that as it may, the purpose of the Persephone Project is to see what can be done with it. Money has been appropriated, Doctor Falstun. Results are expected; in fact, we must guarantee them—over a suitable period of time, of course—in order to function at all."

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FALSTUN SAID nothing; he had nothing to say. Let Morrison do the talking, he thought; it was his function. Falstun had heard the words before, many times; he was tired of them. Wasn't it enough that he had endured the examinations, the indoctrinations, the unnecessary prying into his personal life and habits? Wasn't it enough that he had feigned unnatural interest in the project and the training he had been forced to undertake? Wasn't it enough that he was involved in a marriage that was not yet consummated? It wasn't; he still had to endure again, for the last time he hoped, Morrison's constant chatter.

"Every insignificant detail has been studied by dozens of experts. The project will be the most carefully prepared for adventure man has yet undertaken. Necessarily, we were limited by the amount of allocated funds. Originally, two alternate proposals were made. One large central camp could be set up on Mars to serve as the focal point for a gradually-expanding sphere of colonization and exploration. In contrast, the plan which was finally accepted proposed the establishment of many small foci of colonization. In terms of time and money, we expect it to prove the most expedient."

MORRISON pointed to the model, designating several spots near the polar caps and equator with his left index finger. "For instance, here, here, here. You get the idea? Naturally, the size of the stations would have to be small; in fact, they were designed to support no more than two adults to make the plan practical, moneywise. Obviously, a male and female; preferably husband and wife, both of whom were technically trained. That proved to be the crux of the problem: to find couples of which both partners were technicians and necessarily not specialists.

"Falstun, the rocket must leave within the week and carry its full complement to Mars. We have no choice; we must send you. Under any circumstances, however, we would have never considered you at all if it wasn't for your wife.

"The individuals concerned must want to go, fervently; you don't. Moreover, we are forced to tolerate a situation in which one partner is jealous of the other's achievements. We have no one to take your place—sit down, Falstun."

Roy, halfway to his feet, sank back into the seat. He wanted to protest; he wanted to tell Morrison he was crazy. His lips moved, but his speech failed; he knew that Morrison had spoken the truth. He was jealous of Linda.

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MORRISON continued to batter him with truths he had refused to admit existed. "We know more about you than you yourself realize. For example, we know that your wife supplied you with the basic ideas which turned your thesis from an obscure piece of work, which would have moldered in some library's archives, into a memorable piece of work. It was on the strength of your thesis that you got the offer from Pacific Minerals. We know that you are emotionally unsuited to isolated living; your extrovertism is a by-product of an inferiority complex. When a man feels inferior to his wife, it is as bad for the wife as it is for him. Couple this with a fear of loneliness..."

"I'm no coward," shouted Roy, rising to his feet. This time he remained standing.

"Every man is a coward," said Morrison. "Look at yourself: A fine physical specimen; young; probably endowed with an exceptionally long lifespan, barring accidents; and genetically sound. Physically, you will have no trouble with Mars, as you would have had no trouble with Pacific Minerals. You would have probably made good, even to the point of attaining executive rank. On the other hand, the Persephone Project offers glory, immortality, a concrete place in history."

FALSTUN looked at himself in the mirror. He was a fine specimen of manhood; the women had literally flocked about him during his college career. Yet, he had only been attracted to one—one who had virtually ignored him. He hadn't as yet been able to really fathom why he preferred Linda enough to make her his wife. She wasn't even a pretty girl—rather plain, the studious type. She had always appeared indifferent to the things he enjoyed most; nevertheless, she was the only one in whose presence he lost that vague feeling of insecurity which had always seemed to plague him.

He visualized Linda now, an image in the mirror, as she had appeared the night he had proposed to her. It had been the week before graduation. They had both successfully passed their final orals. All the studying was over; there had only remained the laying on of the hood. He had told her then about the Pacific Minerals offer. He had emphasized the element of risk involved. Prospecting for minerals on the ocean floor was necessarily a risky business. He had emphasized the fact that they could have their own home on the coast, and that his salary would have warranted the setting up of a laboratory so she could carry out her own private research.

The implication had been

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clear, and her answer had shocked him. The first emotion he had felt was fury; such a relationship could not be governed by conditions. He had wanted, in that brief moment, to wipe out the memory of her existence as easily as he could blot the image from the face of the mirror. But the fury could and did not endure. He had tried to reason with her.

THE PERSEPHONE PROJECT was out of the question. It meant a lifetime of isolation; it meant leaving Earth, perhaps for good. It was not the risk that bothered him; working in pressurized areas on the ocean floor was just as dangerous, if not more so, as traveling to the red planet in a sealed can. The territory he would explore would be just as alien as anything Mars could offer.

Reason had not prevailed. Roy sat now staring at a model which would soon be something more than a plastic globe. He had had no choice, he needed Linda, desperately.

Falstun spread his arms in sign of resignation to his fate. "Obviously, I am totally unsuited for life as a Martian," he said. "By your own rules, we should not be allowed to be a part of the Project."

Morrison set the globe to whirling again. "It is seldom," he said, "that we get the ideal combination of geochemist and biologist in husband and wife. Your wife happens to be the most ideally-suited individual for this program whom we have tested up to this time. You are sufficiently qualified in your own field, as well as possessing the necessary physical attributes for survival. You work well under pressure. Of some importance is the fact that you are both able to perform the wide variety of tasks which settlement on Mars will necessitate. Under the present setup, an individual must be able to perform the duties of scientist, doctor, engineer, farmer, and virtually any other occupation you can think of.

"If you think about it, you will be able to overcome your own limitations. I suspect your wife knows your weaknesses; she will help you survive what you expect to be an ordeal. But perhaps, you will find out that the ordeal is really an adventure. Remember: to know thyself is to save thyself."

EXACTLY three days later, Roy and Linda were transported to the Satellite in the shuttle rorket. They had barely time to gaze down on the Earth from its artificial moon for the first time seeing it from space, before they were transferred to the ship which would take them to Mars.

The trip itself was uneventful, in that nothing unexpected happened. From Falstun's viewpoint, the time passed all

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too quickly. The voyage was one long honeymoon; Linda proved to be the perfect, loving wife. During the eight months of bliss, Falstun was unmindful of the cramped quarters of the vessel and the unnatural stresses imposed on his body. Morrison's words, Morrison's warnings, slipped from his consciousness; for a time Falstun believed he was in paradise.

All good things end. Eight months and three days out from Earth, the ship landed. Mars was no longer a model sitting on Morrison's desk; it was no longer just a name, a symbol of some distant goal. It was their immediate environs. An indescribable desolation. The feeling of loneliness which encompassed Falstun when he first set foot on the dusty surface was the worst he had ever experienced. Shut off from the environment by the tight-fitting leather suit, his head confined by the necessary oxygen mask, he quaked inwardly, even with Linda hanging onto his arm. To her, the experience was the fulfillment of a dream; to Falstun, it was the beginning of a nightmare.

The honeymoon was over.

HERE, AT the main headquarters of Project Persephone on Mars, they had barely time to make the acquaintance of the couple—Mars' first settlers—who operated the station, before they were shuttled off to their own little home in the wilderness, somewhere near the equator. The pilot of the atmosphere flyer said little during the eight-hour trip. He left them standing outside the station assigned to them; the small but brilliant sun was just beginning to disappear over the horizon. His parting words were, in essence, a concise summary of the intense training they had undergone before embarking from Earth.

"No one can tell you how to live on Mars. That's your function: to find the best means of survival. All we can do is provide the necessary equipment and materials, and perhaps a few hints from our own personal experience. Good luck."

Good luck indeed, thought Falstun bitterly.

They entered the station together through one of its two airlocks. From the outside, the station looked like a glisten-pinkish plain. The interior was not unfamiliar to them; they knew every vestige of its layout. Falstun, for an instant, thought he had stepped into the mock-up they had trained in on Earth. He was not afraid to admit to himself that he wished it was the mock-up.

The single large room was lit because they wished it so. The light seemed to have no source. The air continuously cycled through the purifiers was maintained at a uniform

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temperature, the optimum for human comfort. The humidity was precisely controlled. And a noise level was maintained not constant but sufficient so that silence was nonexistent.

This was the station. Haven. A bit of home entrenched in an alien environment. In fact, a womb.

THEIR HOMEOSTATIC environment served them well during the first three months. It took that time to establish a routine. Once the routine was established, living on Mars became nightmarish, at least to Roy; Linda, on the other hand, still seemed to enjoy herself. He knew that the novelty would soon wear off; he hoped that Linda would soon grow weary of the monotony and yearn for Earth as he yearned. They could not be forced to stay. It was part of the agreement when they signed up for the project. They were expected to stay for the full term—their natural lifespans. They could still return on the next ship from Earth, but that was not scheduled to land for another two years; he would have to endure Mars for two years.

In the meantime, Roy grew to hate the everyday sounds of the station as he waited fervently for the weekly radio contacts with the headquarters station. He looked forward to conversing with his fellow humans, trapped like him in their own private wombs on distant parts of Mars. When the contacts failed, because of atmospheric disturbances, Roy became more depressed than usual. The conversations served to buttress his faltering morale.

LINDA SPENT a large fraction of her leisure time at work. Her mission was to study the plant life characteristic of the surrounding terrain. Her primary goal was to adapt Earth plants to thrive in the weak atmosphere and Martian soil. The soil, and its minerals, were Roy's province. The outer crust was comprised mostly of silicon, oxygen, and iron, as well as smaller amounts of aluminum and magnesium. He had already found twenty minerals new to him composed of these elements. With the exception of a few pockets of beryllium, he as yet had made no otherwise important discoveries.

There were always the periodic trips out into the wasteland—the flat, desolate wasteland—each trip radiating out a little farther from the station. There were the periodic trips to the channels. A misnomer, actually: they were, in fact, deep gorges, at the bottom of which water sometimes trickled. The sides were often lined with lichenous growths, extending from the edge of the water to the very top to dwindle into the desert. The channels criscrossed Mars, the

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result of erosion and a dwindling atmosphere.

Mars' canals.

Not the result of intelligent planning, but a natural phenomenon.

Besides the atmosphere and temperature, which often hit a hundred below at night and seldom went above fifty during the day, the only other thing that was really inimical to human life on Mars was its equatorial storms. Seasonal, yet erratic, the sand storms were sudden and durable, sometimes lasting for days. To go out in one was suicidal; the sand was driven with such force that it could readily penetrate a man's skin. The station served to shut out the grinding sand as it did the concurrent shrieking noise of the storm.

Their first experience with a Martian sand storm happened on the same day they discovered Pincus.

AN AZURE SKY and a small red sun—the day began no differently than all the others.

Falstun hesitated at the edge of the greenish-brown carpet which spread out before him; a week ago it hadn't been there. The rudimentary plant life had sustained itself along the trickle of water which alternately flowed and disappeared at the foot of the incline. Since then, the melting polar caps had replenished the stream. In response, the lichenous growths had reached out into the desert, reproducing and dying in an endless struggle against the hostile environment. He stood now at the outermost boundaries of this struggle.

At this point, the slope was gentle. Falstun moved as rapidly as possible down the incline, his boots crushing and slipping in the spongy rug. His sample bag tight against his side, the goggles of his mask only obstructed his peripheral vision.

Below, where the stream narrowed, Linda stood, half in and half out of the murky water. Her screams still rang in his ear, her voice distorted by the intercom. "Roy! Help me! Quick! I'm killing it."

ROY FINALLY reached Linda's side. She was holding something beneath the surface of the algae-steeped water. Something which did not struggle.

He pulled her out of the water, forcing her to release the object. She fell back onto the brown carpet with a sob. A small pinkish bundle floated up to the surface of the water. Caught by the current, it began to float downstream.

"Save it," shouted Linda. "We must save it."

Roy quickly strode downstream and picked the object out of the water before it was swept away into the center of the stream. He brought it back

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and placed it gently on the ground beside Linda.

"I don't understand what made me do it," she said. "It must have been the shock of seeing it, the unexpectedness of its appearance. I thought it was attacking me."

"How could that thing have hurt you?" asked Roy. He examined the creature. Its pinkish fur was plastered to its body. It looked harmless.

Likewise, Linda studied its appearance. "We mustn't let it die," she said. She grabbed Roy's shoulders. "There's animal life on Mars."

There was animal life on Mars, thought Roy. Not some many-limbed monster; not an oozing lump of protoplasm which displayed an impossible intelligence—merely an ordinary looking creature, it's only unusual characteristic apparently being the pinkish cast of its fur. And even that wasn't really strange. Yet, by definition, it was still alien.

"If it attacked you, it might be dangerous," said Roy. "In the long run, it might be better off dead."

ROY KNEW then that he had said too much. Linda rose to her feet, picked up the creature, and started up the hill. Roy followed. Linda wanted the animal alive. What she wanted she would have, but they would have to get back to the station first; she could do nothing here.

The station was almost four miles from their present position, built near the same channel only to the west. Over an hour's walk. However, Linda was half-running over the sandy terrain. Roy followed more slowly; there was nothing he could do to aid her.

They had covered half the distance when Roy first noticed the difference in the day. The normally-clear sky had reddened; the disc of the sun was no longer visible. A bright patch in the sky was the only sign that the sun was still there.

A change in the character of the usual changeless Martian day was indicative of only one thing: An approaching storm. This they had been told.

In a few minutes, Roy had caught up to Linda. The sky was now beginning to blacken; soon their visibility would be nonexistent. The wind buffeted them, slowing their progress. The sand rose in great clouds about their feet. The last thousand yards they made by instinct alone, the sand stinging them even through their leathery outer garments. Linda still held the Martian, tight against her breast.

PINCUS was its name; Pincus they called it. They even constructed its own private biome. The chamber enclosed what was essentially a reproduction of the terrain which surrounded the station. Pincus huddled on the red-

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dish ground, blending almost to the point of invisibility. In one corner lay a pile of the rust-colored lichens which seemed to be its only food source. The chamber also enclosed the much-rarefied Martian atmosphere. The first time, the day of the storm, they had brought Pincus inside the station, it had almost died. Not from its experience in the stream, but the atmosphere had been too rich for it. Pincus could not survive in the oxygen-ladden atmosphere of Earth.

The biome was a necessity, a haven within a haven. Pincus' own private womb.

THE CREATURE was well suited to its environment; Linda had pointed this fact out to him many times. It's small, beady, deepset and black eyes, the heavy fur, and the peculiarly clawed paws, all fitted it to a desert existence. Its ability to survive without water for long periods of time was striking. There were other peculiarities; it took Linda just two months to discover them all.

Roy had to admit that it was to her credit that she was able to achieve so much. The problem could be stated simply. The creature must be studied in its entirety—habits, structure, function—yet not killed or mutilated in the process. The problem appeared to be insurmountable, at least, to Roy.

There was only one Pincus. They had searched for others during the succeeding days without success. For all they knew, Pincus was the last of its species on Mars. In any case, Linda often told Roy that she could never do anything to Pincus which would result in permanent harm. Pincus had become not only an object of study but also a pet.

The problem, in any case, was solved. Its solution only required ingenuity.

LINDA HAD the ingenuity; Roy had the necessary mechanical skill. Together, they built the necessary apparatus which Linda required. The station had been stocked with the object of versatility in mind. Its instruments could be adapted to a wide variety of usages. In the end, what appeared to be insurmountable turned out to be no problem at all.

More important was the fact that Pincus had shattered the routine. The native plant life no longer occupied Linda's attention. She neglected her promising discovery that the soil along the channels was rich in mineral-attacking bacteria. She even began to neglect Roy.

For a time, Falstun shared Linda's enthusiasm. He set aside the search for radioactives, the zirconium, tantalum, and titanium which were of top priority. The minerals

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Earth needed for her interplanetary vessels. He helped Linda as much as he could, and learned as she learned.

PINCUS was a vertebrate. Its heart and brain were well formed. Although its lungs were of large capacity, to compensate for the thin atmosphere of Mars, they were still lungs and a hundred percent efficient. It conserved water, excreting none.

Linda had constructed an anatomical model of Pincus, complete in every detail. Roy looked on it as a perfect work of art; it signified the completion of the first phase of the problem.

At this point, Roy lost interest. It wasn't that he couldn't appreciate the gross picture; he could. The detailed study which Linda then undertook was just beyond his grasp. She had progressed from stereoscopic fluoroscopic to submicrosurgical techniques. Histology and the study of cycles bored him.

For the first time since Pincus had entered their lives, Roy began to feel the brunt of Linda's neglect. Linda's habit of putting all her reports orally on tapes irritated him more than usual. He became subject to frequent painful headaches; he grew moody and took to taking farther and farther trips away from the station. He even began to believe that his secret hope that Linda would soon yearn to return to Earth was unfounded. At times, he found himself losing contact with the station and reality, imagining himself on Earth, working for Pacific Minerals as if there had never been a Persephone Project. The dreams persisted, because he wanted them to persist.

HE NO LONGER looked forward to the weekly radio contacts with the other stations. As far as he was concerned, they had degenerated into a mere exchange of technical data. And all of it concerned Pincus; it was Linda's show every time. No one was interested in what Roy had to say; Pincus was the only topic of discussion.

There was one mystery concerning Pincus which these discussions never failed to touch upon: Reproduction. Pincus appeared to have no sex; it was neither a she nor he, not able to find any organs to which she could assign a reproductive function, she did point out to them that "...in the region where one would expect to find the reproductive apparatus localized, there exists instead a queer patch of unspecialized tissue surrounded by what appears to be a dormant glandular tissue."

These facts made no impression on Roy. In his own mind, he thought of Pincus as a male, as Linda probably thought of it as a female. The

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fact of reproduction did bother him. Even his wild imaginings did not relieve his frustrations. Linda's interest in Pincus was intense; in the evenings she was so tired that she often sank into sleeps of exhaustion.

FALSTUN took to taking Pincus outside the station and playing with the creature, against Linda's wishes. But Pincus never roamed far; it stayed near the station and Roy. Whenever Roy had one of his good moods, which was now rare, Pincus avoided him. Whenever Roy felt angry Pincus always seemed to want to play. It was an aspect of Pincus' psychology which he could never hope to understand. The creature always seemed to stare at him with sorrowful looks, as if it desperately wanted Roy to do something. But it never attempted to escape, even though Roy gave it every opportunity to do so. Perhaps Pincus realized it was on to a good thing; the desire for security was universal.

The more Roy learned to like Pincus, the more bitter he became towards Linda. He never associated Linda's neglect with Pincus; it never occurred to him to do so.

It was inevitable that Falstun should release his pent-up emotions in a display of violence.

THE SUN had long since set when Falstun returned to the station that particular evening. He set the flyer down roughly, not bothering to put it away for the night. He had just returned from a survey trip, which had covered a distance of some five hunded miles. He was tired, but not sleepy. The trip had been successful; about a hundred-and-fifty miles to the northeast he had discovered an unusual outcropping on the desert floor. Consisting of a unique mixture of quartz, shale, and pitch, it had exhibited signs of radioactivity. His specimen bag full, he had returned immediately to the station instead of spending the night in the desert as originally planned.

Roy's unexpected entrance into the station did not seem to disturb Linda. Since she didn't show any interest in his appearance, he offered no explanation.

"I have a report to record," said Linda. "I must do it while it's fresh in mind; I hope you don't mind."

"No," he said. Why should he mind? Having already eaten in the flyer while returning to the station, he wanted to begin the analysis of the samples at once. The spectrograph was waiting for him; he turned to it.

Linda began to speak. Her voice picked up by the apparatus on the bench in front of her was magnetically recorded. Roy dumped his specimens on his own work bench.

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He didn't want to hear what his wife had to report, but he had no say in the matter.

"THE NATURE of Pincus' reproductive facilities remains unknown," she said. "It is not, however in any sense unknowable. There are three alternate lines of reasoning which may be followed. One: The creature is a freak, having been born lacking the ability to reproduce itself. Two: The creature is capable of reproducing itself non-sexually, in one of the ways characteristic of lower life forms. And three; Its mode of reproduction is unique unto itself.

"The first line of reasoning admits of the easy solution, in that it states there is no problem. Such a solution is emotionally unsatisfying, and has been rejected. The second alternate admits of being the one most subject to systematic attack. It has been chosen as the most profitable course of action, at the same time, keeping in mind the distinct possibility of the third alternate."

There was a sputter. The spectrograph died. Roy cursed; he tore away the piece of chart which had already been ejected from the instrument and threw it to the floor without looking at it. In a matter of minutes, he had the front panel off and was staring at the instrument's innards. In the background, Linda's voice continued without a break.

"OF THE THREE non-sexual forms of reproduction—binary fission, sporulation—and budding, the latter may most logically constitute Pincus' means of reproduction. Binary fission and sporulation in an organism of the complexity under investigation is wholly unlikely. Budding, on the other hand, is quite probable. Confirmation can only come through demonstration.

"The available evidence suggests that Pincus has not as yet reached full sexual maturity. All its tissues are young tissues; its healing properties are remarkable. However an estimate of its age cannot be given. Its growth processes have apparently long since subsided. During the six months Pincus has been studied, no signs of any growth have been noted. Metabolically, its only waste products of any significance are carbon dioxide and guanidine. It utilizes most elements with an apparent efficiency of a hundred per cent; the rate of its tissue renewal is remarkably high. Thus it appears that Pincus is physically mature, sexually immature, yet possesses a potential to be immortal."

It was impossible for Roy to repair the spectrograph; he couldn't keep his mind on the task. With a grunt, he swept

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the specimens from the bench with his arm. They clashed to the floor. The clatter was great enough to cause Linda to stop abruptly and glance inquisitively at him.

"Is anything wrong?" she asked.

"Wrong? No. No. There's nothing wrong."

LINDA FACED the recorder again. She began to speak, first making sure that the sounds of the disturbance were obliterated from the wire. Roy just watched her, unmoving.

"The question of immortality is disturbing. Nature cannot admit of individual immortality, only species immortality. Admittedly, there are many living organisms which possess potential immortality under ideal conditions. But there are no ideal conditions in nature; there is only balance—and balance is a function of reproduction and death.

"The associated question of stimulus must also be treated. The egg is stimulated by fusion with the sperm to develop, or by chemical or physical agents in parthogenisis. The one-celled organism divides when it has reached a certain critical size. Here the stimulus is growth. The problem of stimulus with reference to the Martian's reproductive ability is one which is subject to experimentation. This..."

"Shut up!" shouted Roy.

Startled, Linda looked at him in surprise. "What is the matter with you?" she asked. "You have been acting very strangely tonight." Her voice as always, showed no signs of undue stress.

"Tonight? Only tonight?"

Falstun crossed the room. He pulled Linda to her feet. She struggled.

"I don't understand," she said. "Let go. I must finish."

He kissed her roughly. "Do you understand now?"

The struggle ceased. "Yes," she hissed. "I hadn't realized. But Pincus..."

"I know," he said, kissing her again.

She responded. That night Falstun forgot his worries; there was no headache, no depression. Linda was once more a wife to him.

DURING the succeeding days, Linda no longer neglected Roy; neither did she neglect Pincus. The experiments went on, but less intensively. She took special pains to explain them to Roy. And he, in turn, tried to listen.

She had succeeded in culturing the tissue which she believed was the site of Pincus' as yet dormant reproductive activities. Her approach was to test the effect of a variety of chemical agents on it as possible stimulants. In addition, she had discovered an unusual cyclic event occuring in Pincus' blood which she

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also tentatively associated with its reproduction.

Unfortunately, something happened to the culture; it died. Linda was forced to repeat the experiment. This necessitated the extraction of another fragment of the required tissue from Pincus. The old flask was set aside, forgotten, its contents allowed to rot.

The trials of research did not interest Roy. His headaches had not ceased; they continued to persist, and in greater frequency. His fits of anger and moodiness began to irritate Linda. For the first time in their relatively short married life, Linda took an active part in the quarrels.

THE OLD doubts continued to assail him with greater force. Why did he ever marry her, he asked himself. It was her fault that he was on Mars. She had had no right to ask him to take the step. He had been a fool; but she had deluded him, she had made him the fool. He knew that she thought him a coward, a weakling, a person who couldn't stand on his own two feet. He just knew it. That's why she married him. She didn't love him; she had never loved him. And she had made him think he needed her—when he, Roy Falstun, could have had his pick of the women, and on his own terms.

If he had had his own way, he could be living the only way a human should live—on Earth. He would have to remain on Mars for more than a year yet, before he could return. And return he would.

She would have to go with him. He laughed at the thought. She would have to go with him; she wouldn't get her way this time, even though she was scheming to keep him here. He made a vow; he would force her to return to Earth with him.

Roy blamed everything that went wrong, every minor irritation on Linda; she became his scapegoat. He bothered her, deliberately making every effort to irritate her, to cause her to do something she might regret. He tried to make life miserable for her and didn't succeed. Linda only ignored him. She didn't speak to him for a whole week. Finally, defeated, he caged himself in the misery of his own thoughts.

THE CONSEQUENCES of Roy's state were inevitable: the doubts evolved into dislikes and the dislikes into hate. At first, the hate was small and inconsistent. But with each passing day, with each passing hour, it grew and intensified. Roy didn't want to hate his wife, but he couldn't help himself.

He took to sitting motionless in front of the biome, staring at Pincus for long periods of time. Pincus watched Roy in turn, almost hypnotically.

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He took to following the the progress of the chart Linda was constructing. It depicted the changes in concentration of the substance she had identified in Pincus' blood and associated with its reproduction. It was a queer sort of cycle. It rose and fell in a matter of hours. Yet the frequency, duration, and amplitude of the oscillations were continually changing, the frequency decreasing, the amplitude and duration increasing. Roy found that he was fitting his moods to the same sort of rhythm.

The greater the amplitude, the more intense was his hate; the greater the frequency, the more numerous were his fits. Soon even these facts slipped from his mind. Soon all he thought was hate.

LINDA BROKE her silence on the day the cycle reached its maximum amplitude and duration. That day, the pressure had built up to such an extent in Falstun's mind that he could no longer repress it. He listened to Linda' words. But they were just that words. Meaningless bits of sound.

"Look at this," she said. She was holding a culture flask in her hand.

Falstun stared at the flask. He attached no significance to the queerly-formed mass of white tissue floating in a blackish slime which formed the bulk of its contents. His mind was in turmoil.

It was Linda's fault, he thought. Linda got him into this mess.

"Well, what is it?" Linda smiled.

He had no answer. His thoughts raced. Only Linda kept him here; if it wasn't for Linda, they would *have* to send him back to Earth. The solution was simple. As simple as one plus one equals two.

"An embryo. Look at it."

"An embryo." Linda held the flask high. "This is the culture I thought had died. It had begun to decay. I have found the stimulus. Pincus' mode of reproduction is non-sexual—and unique."

Falstun's hands clenched and unclenched. It would be so easy. The concept loomed from the depths of his subconscious; it took hold and rooted. Somewhere in the depths, something protested, weakly. It was too late; the pressure was too great, and there was only one way it could be relieved.

Falstun's hands raised. Linda's went suddenly limp. The flask dropped to the floor and shattered. Linda screamed. The scream, turned into a choke, and then a gurgle.

And then silence.

FALSTUN stirred uneasily on the couch, the half-empty cup of stimulant in his hand already cold. For

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the first time in many months, the normal sounds of the station were getting through to him. The throb in his head was replaced by the throb of the power plant buried beneath the floor. The whirs and clicks of the devices in the instrument section fluctuated unrhythmatically, seemingly creating their own peculiar melody.

The odor of decay which still drenched the room no longer bothered him. He was no longer puzzled by the fact that his vision blurred whenever he gazed into the center of the station; he accepted it without question. It was now a manifestation of his normal behavior.

He felt quite normal now, relaxed, at ease, not in the least bit distressed.

It had been the station, he thought, the whole blasted planet. His behavior had been irresponsible. If only Linda would forgive him.

The thought of his wife brought the memory of the dream back to him. Where was she? Where was Linda?

The cup dropped from his lax fingers. The resultant pool of liquid spread rapidly over the floor. Falstun leaped to his feet, the memory of his nightmare strong.

It was a dream. It couldn't have been anything but a dream.

He started towards the center of the room. He remembered everything now. Linda had been standing there, holding the flask. The flask now lay shattered on the floor. And Linda...

The haze cleared. His vision had never really been obstructed; he had only imagined it. He stared at the floor.

It had been no dream.

FALSTUN did not burst into tears; he did not develop hysterics. He did not bend over and fondle the body. All emotion had been drained from him. He felt nothing, not even sorrow.

There was nothing left for him on Mars—or Earth; for the first time in his life he was truly alone.

The station was an empty tomb, devoid of sounds and life. Roy Falstun was an empty husk devoid of all but one desire—the desire to obliterate from his consciousness the knowledge of his guilt. He turned once again to the biome to seek the comfort of Pincus' gaze. Pincus stood there, nose pressed against the inner face, waiting for him. The two stared at each other.

Falsun had begun to imagine things. For an instant he thought he had been staring into Linda's eyes. For an instant the pressure had begun to build up in his mind again, only this time it was readily repressed. And in that instant the concept once again entered his conscious-

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ness. Only this time, in its true light.

Kill me.

IN THAT instant, Falstun knew. He didn't even have to rationalize; it was all so simple. All the facts lying dormant in his subconsciousness tumbled into place.

He had not killed Linda. Pincus had.

It was funny. He began to laugh; he laughed until tears streamed down his face. It was all so funny, a simple case of misdirection.

It had been a mistake in judgement on Pincus' part; it had chosen the wrong individual to influence. But perhaps he had been more susceptible than Linda.

More out of pity than anything else, Falstun opened the biome with the simple flick of a switch. The front panel slid slowly up. The two atmospheres equalized as Pincus tumbled to the floor.

Falstun looked at him. Already the creature's system was overloading with oxygen. Pincus looked almost as if it was in ecstasy. But then, reproductive processes were generally pleasurable.

Falstun turned towards the lock, Pincus forgotten. He had yet one thing to do. The inner door slid slowly open at his touch. The outer lock was almost as easily opened. The burst of sand took him full in the chest. He still managed to force his way out into the storm with the help of the outrushing air behind him.

Again, the two atmospheres equalized. And fate willed that life should continue, perhaps for another eternity. Pincus revived slowly, the moment of ecstasy gone. Resigned to its fate, it crept into the shelter of one of the room's corners, out of the path of the inblown sand. It would have to wait out the storm inside the station.

For this was the one thing it could not do.

Kill itself.

Department of Definitions

Ultimate Entropy is Cosmic Democracy.

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OH, THAT LOST SENSE OF WONDER!

by Isaac Asimov

When spaceships first discovered space
In science fiction's rise,
The authors never felt the need
To sow a psychologic seed
Or sociologize.

But oh, that wonderful new craze
In good old Hugo's glorious days.

When he-men really met and clashed
With ray-guns in each fist,
The heroine was kept below,
She scarcely ever made a show.
What's more, she was not missed.

And, oh, the gorgeous happy blaze
Of good old Orlin's glorious days.

But people call those ancient tales
Sub-literate old trash,
And writers now insist that they
Must copy Joyce and Hemingway
To get that ready cash.

For wonder by itself won't pay
This modern literary day.

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INSIDE SCIENCE FICTION

Reports and Reminiscences

by ROBERT A. MADLE

WE WERE at a science fiction conference recently. It was held in Cincinnati, Ohio, and was attended by almost 150 people. Nothing unusual in that, it might be said. True, go to quite a few s-f gatherings over the course of each year—but this affair *was* unusual. Rather than in a hotel, this conference took place in a beautiful, recently-constructed *motel*—with such comforts of modern civilization as a swimming pool and an ice-cube machine which dispenses these necessities of conventioneering gratis. The gathering was the annual Midwestcon, held at the North Plaza Motel, in Cincinnati.

The Midwestcon is not a recent development in the science fiction world. This was the eighth in this annual series, and they improve with age. They have always been known for being completely informal—as a matter of fact, there is little, if any, planned program. However, despite this lack of planning, they invariably turn out to be more interesting than the annual World Convention.

This time, at the banquet, which is the *only* planned entertainment, Robert Bloch, as is the Midwestcon custom, acted as MC. Some of you older readers may remember some of the ghastly stories Bloch used to do for the dear, departed *Weird Tales*. Well, as an MC Bloch is even more ghastly. He possesses a ghoulish sense of humor which keeps the audience howling with fiendish glee. Isaac Asimov was Bloch's target this time; Bloch had the audience almost prostrate with laughter as he read from some of the works of Asimov. However, Asimov retaliated, reading from the works of Robert Bloch. Among those laughing were Edward E. Smith, Edmond Hamilton and Mrs. Hamilton (Leigh Brackett), Thomas N. Scortia, Charles V.

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De Vet, L. Sprague de Camp, Dean McLaughlin, Joe L. Hensley, and P. Schuyler Miller.

IT MIGHT be asked, "Judging by the names mentioned, isn't this just a meeting of professional writers?" Not at all. There were numerous representatives of all phases of fandom, including the most active members of this strange inner world. Some like G. M. Carr, F. M. & Elinor Busby, and E. Everett Evans (who is as much a fan as a pro—as are, incidentally, all of the other writers mentioned above) traveled from the west coast. Other fan groups were present, from such active centers as Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Detroit, New York, and most points east and west, and north and south. In reality, the Midwestcon represents a cross-section of the most active elements of all phases of the science fiction world.

The Midwestcon will again be held in 1958—probably toward the end of June. It will be sponsored by the same group: Don Ford, C. L. Barrett, Lou Tabakow, Stan Skirvin, and Roy Lavender; and it will be held at the same motel. There will be no admission charge or registration fee. All interested are invited to write to Don Ford, Box 19-T, RR#2, Wards Corner Road, Loveland, Ohio. Don will be pleased to place you on his mailing list.

MR. SCIENCE FICTION Champions S-F on TV: Forrest J. Ackerman went up against Tom Duggan, notorious Southern California telecaster, for 15 minutes recently. Duggan, known as the "Poor Man's Mike Wallace," is noted for his long needle. FJA was given ample time to describe his activities and career in the s-f world, from beginning to present, emphasizing his present agenting and columning. This is a program where people call in, and the first, of course, asked 4e what he thought flying saucers. FJA replied, "In my opinion most of the people who see flying saucers are already *in their cups!*"

Ackerman told how he first learned of artificial satellites —from *Science Wonder Stories* in 1929* when he was a high-school lad. Other topics discussed were H. G. Wells, Bradbury, and intelligent ants. The final question put to Forry was, did he believe in life on other worlds? To which a very affirmative reply was given.

NEWS AND VIEWS: Carl H. Claudy, who wrote some of the very first science fiction we read, died May 27. at the age of 78. Mr. Claudy may be remembered as the author of juvenile s-f which

*"The problems of Space Flying", by Captain Hermann Noor Noordung, *Science Wonder Stories*, July, August and September, 1929.

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appeared in the *American Boy*. Later, some of the novels appeared in book-form under such titles as "The Mystery Men of Mars," "A Thousand Years A Minute," and "The Blue Grotto Terror."

A letter from James Warren, editor, *After Hours*, a nationally-distributed magazine, informs us that the issue to appear in September is a special s-f number, featuring an Out-of-this-World folio by Forrest J. Ackerman. This will consist of an unusual historical treatment of "sci-fi," liberally illustrated with reproductions of actual magazine covers. Other features will be a short-short by FJA, "The Great Male Robbery"; an illustrated article on scientifilms; a selection of s-f cartoons; and a short story by Arthur Porges. If you can't find it on your newsstand, write to the editorial office, 1054 E. Upsal Street, Phila. 50, Pa.

"COSMIC PASSION Rips the Screen!" So proclaims the ad for yet another of these so-called s-f double features. This time it's "Man Beast" and "Prehistoric Women." Cast unknown and unimportant... "Invasion of the Flying Saucer Men" and "I Was A Teen-Age Werewolf" are interesting primarily because they were directed by an active Fan of almost 25 years ago, James Nicholson.

THE FANZINES

SCIENCE FICTION YEARBOOK: 50¢ from Fandom House, PO Box 2331, Paterson 23, New Jersey. The editors of the bi-weekly s-f newspaper, *Fantasy Times*, have introduced something brand-new in the field—a complete coverage of all phases of s-f for the past year. Thomas S. Gardner reviews magazine s-f for 1956; Frank Prieto supplies the statistics on the ever-changing field; Stephen J. Takacs lists every hardcover (and softcover) book published in USA during the past year; and Forry Ackerman analyzes the scientifilms. The editors give a brief resume of the entire field, including foreign s-f, fandom, and the world convention.

The most important article, however, is "Science Fiction Market Survey 1956," by Sam Moskowitz. Sam has gathered statistics (obtained from more than 300 questionaires returned by fans and general readers of s-f) which are, in some instances, rather startling. These statistics, when computed and analyzed, display the "amazing" fact that readers of *Amazing Stories* are somewhat older than readers of *Astounding Science Fiction*. In fact, practically the same group that reads *Amazing* also reads *Astounding*, indicatng that there is no

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"juvenile" group toward which certain publications are slanted. Other deductions (backed up by cold statistics) are that 75% of s-f readers are adults, and that the reading habits of general readers and fans are relatively the same. This artical should be of interest to everyone in the field.

SKYHOOK: 20¢ from Redd Boggs, 2209 Highland Place NE, Minneapolis 21, Minnesota. This is a very attractively mimeographed magazine of 30 pages, slanted for people interested in science fiction analyses and criticism. For some time, this magazine has been distributed on a private basis; it is now available to anyone interested enough to put two thin dimes in an envelope and mail them off.

James E. Gunn pens an interesting appraisal of what science fiction should do—how it should orient its readers. Mr. Gunn indicates, as many others have recently, that science fiction is not for the general reader: during the boom many readers of general fiction picked up s-f, but found that they and it had little, if anything in common. Consequently, they didn't come back for more. They were not oriented to s-f. But to the readers who are s-f oriented (future-directed is the term used by Gunn), s-f should say something. It should be a "Window On Tomorrow", an imposition of our attitudes, ideas, and judgments upon the era of the future.

This, thinks Mr. Gunn, could conceivably attract other readers as even the reader of present and historical fiction is interested only in "...ourselves or our society—a truth which transcends the phoniness of the setting in which we find it."

James Gunn's concept is not startling. It seems to us that s-f has been comparing our society with those of the future, and with those of other worlds, for many years now. Some of the early s-f, particularly in the Gernsback era, superimposed our attitudes on the era or civilization at hand—often turning out to be nothing more than social criticism. Today this method of superimposition is effectively utilized by such writers as Pohl and Kornbluth. Gunn ends his well-written article by saying, "But we are even more concerned with what will happen tomorrow when today's problems will be resolved. The trend in government toward what some call socialism and others a planned economy is a prime example." The answer to this is that today's average man is interested in the future only so much as it affects him: in this instance, social welfare and the planned economy implies *security* to him. That and nothing more.

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The magazine contains other excellent (and we are not using the term indiscrimately) material by S. J. Sackett, Joe Gibson, Damon Knight, Jim Harmon, Marion Zimmer Bradley, and William Atheling, Jr., a critic of the Damon Knight school. Atheling, by the way, is reputed to be a nom-deplume for one of today's leading writers in the field. *Skyhook* is recommended without qualifications.

FRANK KELLY FREAS *a portfolio:* $1.50 from Advent Publishers, 3508 N. Sheffield, Chicago 13, Illinois. Advent, composed of a group of fans, entered the publishing field last year with Damon Knight's *"In Search of Wonder."* Quite successful with their entry, they have now released a collection of Freas' best illustrations—taken from *Astounding, IF, Science Fiction Stories,* and *Science Fiction Quarterly,* and other magazines. The illustrations (on slick paper) are preceded by an autobiographical sketch of Freas, who proves to be a reader and collector of s-f of many years standing. The reproduction of the drawings is far superior to their original presentation, and this pamphlet should certainly prove to be a collector's item.

CAPSULE REVIEWS:

MAGNITUDE: 10¢ a copy from Ralph Stapenhorst, 409 W. Lexington Drive, Glendale 3, California. A very neat little multilithed publication featuring material of a serious-constructive nature. This is the type of magazine the outer-circle reader can buy and thoroughly appreciate on first reading. In contrast, some fan publications are so esoteric in nature that only a very select few find them of interest.

METROFAN: a free copy will be sent to anyone in the Metropolitan area by Dave MacDonald, 101 W. 109th Street, New York 25, N. Y. This is published primarily to publicize the New York fan clubs and fan groups. Meetings of the NY Science Fiction Circle and the Eastern S-F Association are announced. Also features articles and news items concerned primarily with what goes on in the big town. If you reside in the vicinity of NYC or Newark, drop a card to the editor. He'll be glad to place you on his mailing list—for at least an issue or two.

TWIG: a mimeod bi-monthly, 10¢ for a sample from Guy E. Terwilleger, 1412 Albright St., Boise, Idaho. *Twig,* now in its 5th issue, is one of the few regularly appearing fanzins today. It is a magazine which covers both the serious-constructive aspects of s-f, as well as the lighter fan person-

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ality angles. A recent issue was a burlesque of the burlesque-magazine itself, *Mad*. Other issues carry book and movie reviews, discussions of the pro-zines, and fan biographies. *Twig* has a nice, well-rounded personality and is worth sampling.

Send all fanzines for review to Robert A. Madle, 7720 Oxman Road, Palmer Park, Hyattsville, Maryland.

And Now The News...

The magazine you are reading went on sale November 1st. One month from this date, you will see Issue Number 35 of FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION, which now returns to bi-monthly schedule. It will appear alternately with SCIENCE FICTION STORIES, and will be dated February, 1958.

The forthcoming issue seems to be shaping up rather well. We'll have a somewhat sardonic novelet by Wallace West, entitled "Haunted Centennial". This is the centennial of the first moon rocket; it isn't a ghost story, but the centennial is very definitely haunted by a skeleton-in-the-closet type of spook. Some rather shady doings attended that initial moonflight, and the sins of the fathers are visited upon the grandchildren.

David Gordon is with us, offering a fascinating extrapolation upon the ever-current problem of how to avoid treating a man suspected of crime as guilty, without leaving the investigators helpless while he takes off wherever he had a mind to.

Margaret St. Clair tells the bitter story of "Squee"; Carol Emshwiller relates the matter of the "Idol's Eye", and Dr. Asimov will be with us in the fiction department, this time — one of his tales with a sting.

Look for us around December first; I don't think you'll be sorry.

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dangerous weapon

by Donald Franson

"If you fear it, you don't have to fear it; it's the danger you don't fear that you have to be afraid of!"

THE SOUND of a hammer driving a nail—knock, knock, knock, bop, *bap*. It always appealed to Brockton as a sound of something being accomplished, as the nail is driven in on the last blow. A satisfying noise, he thought.

It was going to be a nice shack.

Then he thought of the house on Yucca Flat, smashed to the ground before it had a chance to burn.

Oh, forget it! This was vacation! He was building a shack in the woods, and he was going to live here for a few months and hunt and fish and forget all about the atom tests.

Starting *now*.

Brockton began hammering in another nail, and now it sounded like five, four, three, two, one, *zero*.

Sweat broke out on his forehead, and he put the hammer down on top of the unfinished wall, reached in his pocket for a handkerchief. His car keys fell out and he stooped for them, and he must have nudged something, for the hammer came tumbling down on his head, *bam*.

That *hurt*. He put his hand on his head, and it felt as if a bump was starting. That could have knocked him cold. Fortunately the hammer hadn't fallen very far. He picked up the keys and handkerchief, and mopped his brow.

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If he had conked himself proper, the next atom project would have had to get along without him. Maybe that would have been to his liking. He didn't much care for playing with fire anymore, especially the kind of fire that could get out of hand some day and consume its makers. When would they stop testing, he wondered, and start *using?*

"That's a fine weapon," said a voice.

BROCKTON turned around, and he saw a big man standing near. The man wore what looked like fur swimming trunks, but then no outfit is unusual in the wilds of California. The stranger had a full beard and long hair; yet he didn't resemble the fanatic nature-boy or hermit type. He seemed intelligent and amiable as well as muscular. Brockton looked around for the weapon he was talking about, but all he could see was the hammer and a few nails lying in the dust. "Weapon?"

"That hammer there." The man pointed. "It seems to be more efficiently made than this." He drew a stone hammer from his belt. It was the grand-daddy of all prehistoric implements, realistic, even to the thongs tied around the rough wooden shaft, securing the stone head. This caveman get-up was complete, thought Brockton, as the man went on.

"The strings keep loosening and the stones keep slipping. I have to make replacements too often. And quality control is the chief bottleneck; it takes a long time to make a good one. I can't possibly keep all our warriors supplied, even with my three apprentices."

"What are you, a prop man?"

"Prop man? I'm a weapon-maker. I'm looking for better weapons. That hammer there, seems to be just what I want. That is, if it's not too difficult to make. I would prefer it a little larger—but then, you're small; maybe it's easier for you to swing when you're bashing your enemies."

Brockton looked puzzled. "Bashing? It's only a hammer." Was this fellow a lunatic?

THE MAN spoke again, a little bewildered. "Don't you use these hammers for fighting?"

There was something charming about this preposterous stranger; if he was a nut, he was a new sort. "Very rarely," said Brockton.

"Oh, I see. You don't have too many of these hammers, then." Was this character practicing for a play or something? But he seemed so honest, so sincere, that a feeling came over Brockton that this was really a serious conversation. It passed, but he thought he'd carry on with it, anyway.

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The bearded man repeated, this time as a question, "These hammers, then, are rare and expensive?"

Brockton smiled. "Oh, no. Why, I've got, let's see, three or four of them all told. I guess every family in America has a hammer or two. In workshops, garages, factories. Hardware stores are full of them. You know, supply caves?" He could go along with a gag. He picked up the hammer and knocked the dust off it. "No, I guess hammers are not very rare; you could find them lying around most anywhere."

The man looked shocked. "Lying around? How can your people survive? Don't they constantly pick up these weapons and kill one another?"

"Oh, now, my people aren't such a bloodthirsty lot," protested Brockton, laughing.

"Neither are mine. But put weapons like *that* in their hands..." A look of fear was in his eyes. "Supply caves full of them!" But he quickly controlled himself. "I can't let this interfere with my purpose. This weapon would be safe enough, in the right hands. I'd like to borrow one of these hammers, learn how to make it."

Brockton thought a while, then decided the man was harmless. So he said, "Here, you can have this. I got another one in the car. Bring it back when you're through with it." He held out the hammer, handle first, and the other stretched out his hand.

THE STRANGER looked disappointed at what followed, but as if he should have known it.

Brockton was dumbfounded.

The hand and the handle did not make contact; they passed through each other. Brockton tried to pass the hammer to the stranger without success, then felt foolish and dropped it at his feet.

"You—you're a ghost?" Brockton felt suddenly weak in the knees.

The stranger, who still looked solid as ever, said, "I'm intangible, I think. That is, I'm intangible to you—to your world. You're intangible to me. That's why he said *learn*, not *bring*, I suppose."

"You're in another world?"

"I don't know where I am now; a few minutes ago, I was in the hut of the sorcerer. Now I'm apparently somewhere in a forest." He looked down at the ground. "The same world, though. Another time."

"The past?" Brockton was coming out of his daze.

"No, the future. Oh—*your* past, yes. The sorcerer said a thousand generations." He spoke the word *sorcerer* with not awe but familiarity, as one would say *doctor*.

"This—*sorcerer* sent you?"

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There was awe, however, in Brockton's tone.

THE PREHISTORIC man squatted down, began idly chopping at the dirt with his ancient stone hammer, making no impression. "Yes. He's the finest sorcerer in all Mastodon Land."

"Why didn't he come himself?" Brockton found himself asking.

The man looked up. "I'm a weapons expert; I'm skilled in making and designing weapons. I invented the criss-cross lashing." He held up the stone hammer to illustrate. "The sorcerer thought I would learn new methods easier."

"A technician?" Brockton had a feeling of kinship. "A thousand generations—why, that's thirty thousand years! I didn't know there were men in America at that time." He looked again at the stone hammer the man was holding. "You really must be from the stone age. Do you have iron, or any other metals? If not, you probably can't make a hammer like mine."

The caveman was studying Brockton's hammer, placing his own beside it. "Iron?" He groped for the word, apparently didn't recognize it. How did he know English anyway? "We only have stone and wood. Where can I get iron?"

"It's a long story," said Brockton doubtfully. Should he tell the stranger anything, even if he remembered exactly what the process was?

Let's see—you take the red rocks and heat them, and coal, black rocks, or was it charcoal? Yes, the burning of charcoal would reduce the iron ore. But he thought of some science-fiction stories he had read, of changing the past and ruining the present. Wasn't this a little bit too important a thing to be monkeying with? Let sleeping dogs lie; let the past affect the future, not the future the past.

"It's a pretty complicated process, making iron," Brockton said. "Too hard to explain. You haven't the technology, the know-how."

THE MAN from the past looked glum. "I was afraid of that. It took many generations to acquire our stone-chipping know-how. But we've got to have some improvement on our present method, sooner or later. This iron would be just the thing, if we could shape it the way you have. How do you do that?"

Brockton was deliberately vague. "Oh, we get it very hot and it becomes soft. Then we put it in the shape we want it, let it cool, and it becomes hard again."

"Like the stone from the smoking mountain? That would take a great deal of

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heat—I guess it's beyond us." He frowned as he made an attempt to tighten the strings on his weapon. "Our biggest trouble is in the stone-to-shaft joint. I see that you've licked it—with iron. This grooved-stone and split-stick method of joining is not very secure. The hole in the iron and expansion of the wood by a wedge that you use is much better—but how can you make such a hole in stone without weakening it? I've tried it—ninety-nine percent rejects. But the method I'm using now." He sighed unhappily. "Our warriors and hunters are always complaining of wobbling stones—and if they come off and are lost, they claim the right to hit me once with the shaft. I get more lumps that way. Sometimes I feel like going back to being a hunter—but the tribe insists I stick to research and manufacturing."

BROCKTON felt sorry for him, but he couldn't go giving away things like this. There was a lull in the conversation, during which Brockton did some thinking. "How is it you speak English?"

"Your language? The sorcerer said I would be able to converse with anyone I met."

"I'm sorry there's no one else to meet around here for miles."

"I can't leave the sorcerer's hut; that is, I can't leave this spot, where the hut is located."

Brockton found himself believing whatever the man said, without question. "Then you're lucky you at least met me. Sorry I can't help you, but—well, to be perfectly frank, I don't like the idea of introducing new weapons into an unsuspecting world."

The stranger guessed this was the real reason for Brockton's reluctance, and made another try. "I realize it's a dangerous weapon; but we weapon-men would keep it a secret, only use it in defense and open battle."

Brockton shook his head. "No weapon seems to ever be kept a secret. Take it from me, after a thousand generations of history. It wouldn't be long before your whole world would have it. This weapon..." It was hard to think of a *hammer* as a weapon. Hammer and tongs, hammer and sickle... "We have our own troubles, you know, with new weapons."

"I thought you didn't have wars."

"Oh, we have wars," said Brockton. "Bigger wars than *you* have ever seen."

THE CAVEMAN'S imagination was stirred. He stood up and waved his stone hammer in circles, as if fighting off imaginary hordes. "Great armies with iron hammers flashing, bashing..."

Brockton laughed. "No, no,

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we don't use hammers in wars. We use them mostly for carpentry, you know, making useful things out of trees? We have other weapons. We have..." He hesitated. What would the man believe, anyway? What was the saying, *wonder soon passes into disbelief, then scorn?* "Knives—spears—arrows."

"What are arrows?"

"Oh-oh. Never mind. They're complicated weapons, better than spears." The man evidently didn't recognize some English words if they stood for things not familiar to him. Brockton decided not to go into too many details. "Then we have guns, they kill at a distance, like when you throw a hammer."

"Throw a hammer?" shouted the caveman, astounded.

Brockton was frightened. What had he said? Didn't the man know about throwing? Hadn't they learned this simple thing yet? This was ridiculous! Even monkeys throw coconuts, or did they? But he was greatly relieved at the next words of the prehistoric man.

"We *never* throw a valuable hammer. The enemy might get hold of it and turn it against us. They're very hard to replace, so we hold on to them. We don't have mass production—I think I told you; I suppose you don't value them so highly, at that."

"Oh," said Brockton, "I see. I meant something cheap and plentiful, like stones. You throw stones, don't you?" He was glad to hear that the man was familiar with this. He would have to be more careful. "Guns throw stones, iron stones, far and fast. Machine guns throw many stones almost at the same time. Cannons throw large boulders, for miles. So you see, we don't bother with hammers in battle."

THE CAVEMAN'S look was a mixture of wonder and respect. "And it doesn't matter that you have hammers lying around for the picking up. That's something to think about. A whole country full of hammers, but you refrain from using them, when you could overnight bash each other's brains out." He made one last appeal. "Won't you give me the secret of the iron hammer then, *and* the knowledge to use it wisely, as you do?" He looked hopeful.

But Brockton still refused, he didn't know exactly why. "We're not so wise ourselves in the control of our own newest weapon. I have no good advice to give you on that score."

"What is this new weapon, new to you, that you're talking about?"

Brockton looked unhappy. "Well, it comes in several sizes, but their effects are somewhat the same. A flash of lightning, many times

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brighter than the sun. Then a great fire and cloud, a tremendous blast, and very many people die. It's something we fear very much. Yet it comes from a small thing. Men drop it from the sky. They ride on birds." He felt silly, saying it this way, but the caveman showed he understood.

"Is it an enemy tribe that has this weapon, is that why you fear it?"

"No, all major—er, tribes have it now."

"That's funny," said the caveman. "A new weapon is advantageous if one tribe uses it; no advantage if they all do. The reason I came here to get a new weapon, was to help my tribe. The iron hammer, mass production, would have been just the thing, to make my tribe respected over all Mastodon Land. But then you say *all* tribes would eventually have the hammer." He looked troubled.

"I BELIEVE you're right," he went on. "It can't be kept a secret for more than a few generations. Then we'd be right back where we started, and nothing accomplished, *and we'd live in a world of fear, with terrible hammers all over the place...*" He seemed wrought-up. But a new thought came to him.

"No, that isn't right!" he exclaimed. "You have the hammers, but you're not terrorized by them. You leave them lying around. You use them for carpentry. Are you *sure* people don't use them to murder one another?"

"Oh, I'll admit there are a few hammer murders, once in a while. Sometimes a poor devil goes crazy and kills somebody with one."

The caveman waved this aside. "Berserk. That's not what I meant. Stones and fists would serve his purpose, as well as hammers. I mean, no common desire to kill, just because the hammer is there? And your other handy weapons— I suspect *they're* not in constant use, either, are they?"

"Well, no, sometimes in crimes, but most of them only in wars."

"If these other weapons don't worry you, why are you afraid of this new weapon, this lightning-cloud?"

Brockton scratched the bump on his head. "Well—a few of them can cause great damage. It's worse than other weapons in that respect. It annihilates everything for miles around, and poisons the atmosphere. A lot of innocent bystanders get killed. We haven't used it much yet, for that reason. We're afraid it might get out of hand—beyond our control."

"That's what I thought would happen with a world full of hammers. **But you've apparently mastered the desire to hammer one another. Why don't you think you'll also control the desire to kill**

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by lightning? You are much ahead of us. Tell me—are these lightning-cloud makers lying around loose, like the other weapons?"

"NO, THEY'RE too expensive. They're only to be used in wars between nations, great tribes."

"Then it's wars that you're afraid of, not the weapon."

Brockton had to admit this was true. Who was this fellow—Socrates' ancestor?

"Well then, if your people don't pick up hammers and bash one another, then your leaders aren't likely to pick up lightning-clouds and annihilate one another's tribes, are they?"

"That's what bothers me," said Brockton, frowning.

The man showed some disbelief. "That isn't consistent. *Aren't your leaders as responsible as your people?* In our tribe, if the leaders don't do what the people want, they are overthrown. We have a handy cliff for that purpose."

Brockton couldn't help smiling. "Our leaders—in my country anyhow—seldom do anything the people don't like. We don't have the cliff method, but one just as good."

The other probed further. "How about all the other great tribes; aren't their leaders afraid of their people, too?"

Brockton considered. "Well, if you put it just that way, yes—even the worst ones. They're always talking peace, whether they mean it or not. They could be planning war for all I know."

"You see, you *are* far ahead of us. Even your most warlike leaders have to please their people by *talking peace.* It's a long step forward from *glorifying war.*"

Strange philosopher this, for a caveman.

"IT SEEMS to me this new weapon you fear is not much more dangerous, in *your* hands, than the hammer. I think it's only fearful to you now, because it's new, bigger than anything you have ever had before. To me they *all* seem marvelous, and dangerous. Maybe it's a good thing you fear it just now, so you can guard against its misuse. In Mastodon Land, we have a saying: *'If you fear it, you do not have to fear it; it's the danger you don't fear that you have to be afraid of.'"* He put his stone weapon back in his belt.

"The hammers, the bird-riders, the stone-throwing machines—each weapon brings a new challenge, but it doesn't matter any more. You have learned—*control.* You leave the weapons lying around but seldom use them except for war, and reluctantly then. Maybe we are on the road to it in our time. We weapon-men don't massacre our own tribespeople, though we have the opportunity. But with us,

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only a *few* are responsible—your whole tribe, maybe your whole world, seems to be responsible. You shouldn't worry about this new weapon—you'll control it. You'll use the lightning for carpentry, as well as the hammer."

He looked longingly at the metal hammer, shook his head in resignation. "Perhaps it would stir up trouble, ahead of its time. I can't argue with the future." He sighed.

"I'm afraid the sorcerer will be even more disappointed than I am. This must have cost him a fortune in magic powders. I'll just have to tell him the science of a thousand generations in the future is too much for me. I talk with a user of lightning, brighter than the sun, yet he can't—or won't—show me how to make a simple iron hammer. The sorcerer will be sadly disappointed. But he's a wise man, and a kind one; he'll understand.

"I'll have a harder time convincing him of the other fact—that you have many fine and terrible weapons but leave them lying around. Many opportunities to get them, in every home, workshop, supply cave, get them and bash in each other's skulls, but you *don't*. He'll have a hard time believing such utopia exists, this side of heaven."

BROCKTON was thinking hard. He started to say, "I'm sorry I couldn't help you," but the caveman was gone.

The stranger was there, then he wasn't there. It was almost as if it were a dream.

Maybe it was a deam.

He had seemed to talk English, yet was from an age that could scarcely have known speech. He had a ready explanation, that the sorcerer had said he would be able to converse with anyone he met. No explanation at all. No explanation for sorcerers either. Or time-traveling cavemen who disappeared into thin air.

But the man had seemed convincing enough in character. He had talked sensibly, perhaps only on one subject, as in dreams. It always seems you are talking seriously about the craziest things, in dreams. It never seems inconsistent. Dream stuff. Yet...

It sounded mighty sensible.

Even if he *had* dreamed it, and it had come from his own subconscious mind. He could have been knocked out by the hammer falling, been unconscious without realizing it. He did have a sizable bump to show for it.

His eye rested on the hammer, lying in the dust where he had dropped it, and he picked it up.

He hefted it. He made a few whizzing swings with it. "Bash!" he said.

Then he laughed. He laughed loud and long, better than he had laughed since—

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oh, it must have been years.

He wasn't afraid of this weapon.

Or *any* weapon.

If man could control hammers, he could control the atomic bomb and all its train.

He picked up a handful of nails, found the board he had been nailing on, and reached up. Knock, knock, knock, bop, *bap!*

Carpentry.

Yes, we *will* use it for carpentry.

THE LAST WORD

THIS DEPARTMENT is for you, our readers, and is a vehicle for airing your opinions. We shall publish as many letters in each issue as space allows, and it makes no difference whether they are complimentary, or whether the editor is lambasted for what you think was an error of judgement in selecting stories. If you want to argue with an author, or with other letter-writers, here is an open forum for you.

While the editor may comment upon any given opinion, and may express one of his own at times, this is your department, and you have the last word. And whether your letter is published or not, rest assured that your opinions are read carefully and taken into consideration. All suggestions for improvement are welcome, and we will follow them wherever feasible.

HE GOT HIS WISH

Dear Editor:

When I read "One Small Room" by Thomas N. Scortia, in a recent issue of *Future Science Fiction*, I must confess that my feelings were rather mixed. Looking at it one way I felt pretty good. Here was a new author with a well-written story, good characterization and a sensible plot and convincing wind-up. On the other hand there was nothing new in "One Small Room". And pretty much the same can be said about "A Walk In The Snow", which was in *Science Fiction Quarterly*. Very good writing and characterization, and so we have another man who's just a first class writer.

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He doesn't know how many "themes" which may seem perfectly natural to him are all played out and have been worked to death so far as steady science fiction readers.

"Just a first-class writer" ...how mere can you get? Lord how the field needs that mere mereness. But notwithstanding, I still wished that Scortia could stink a little maybe but come up with fresh ideas.

Well, I got my wish and I'm glad I wished it too, because your September issue features "Genius Loci", which has a dilly of an idea in it. Writing's good, characters okay, but it does bear a slight aroma of overcomplication and the author's realizing all of a sudden that there are such things as word limits. Never mind, I'm still glad—*glad,* I tell you—GLAD! Maybe some day Scortia can make this one into a book-length and sell it for more money and more durable fame. After all, magazines usually don't hold together or aren't held together as long as books.

Fred Walker, Pittsburgh, Penna.

I have to bear in mind what readers *ought* to bear in mind, namely that *everyone* who buys a copy of the magazine hasn't been reading it for years, perhaps hasn't been reading science fiction for years. So those to whom "One Small Room" was fresh are lucky; their first encounter with the theme was well done.

Unfortunately, in too many instances when a person is captured by reading science fiction, he is almost hypnotized. He doesn't particularly notice, and perhaps doesn't care, whether a story is well done—it's all so wonderful! Becoming addicted to science fiction is falling in love, in a way; and how can you expect close analysis and discerning criticism under those circumstances? It's when the spell starts to wear off that the new reader begins talking about what's wrong with science fiction.

GIMMICK SUB-SUBDIVISION

If Royale is not Garrett (my own first thought) then he *must* be Silverberg. No? Oh, well... Who were John Danelaw and Michael Sherman (you've admitted them both as pennames for someone.) And just how many different names has Silverberg been using, not only with you, but with the rest of the boys. Same for Garrett.

The editorial, with its companion think-piece from "Cynical Reader", was extremely interesting to me at the present, since I am now

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engaged in one hell of a struggle to break into the pro ranks. I, too, have delusions of someday writing a truly great novel, capable of winning the Nobel literature prize. I even have an outline of several events and a fairly complete listing of central characters on hand, for I have been reworking this story mentally about six years.

It is not science fiction. Furthermore, it is not printable in any of the magazines now in existence in this country, although quite ligitimate in its treatment of sex and life. A few years ago, my friend asked me why I didn't convert it into science fictional terms. My reply was that the story would have been completely swallowed up by a divergent and completely unnecessary background. It seems to me that a story—a real story—is something that can stand on its own two feet, without relying on any gimmicks or gags.

And—painful though it is to say it—science fiction is strictly a gimmick sub-subdivision of fiction. I think Sturgeon proves this thoroughly, particularly with stories like "Hurricane Trio" from *Galaxy* a couple of years ago. It is my understanding that the story originally was written as straight mainstream fiction, with no fantastic element thrown in. Unfortunately, the mainstream magazines—even the literary quarterlies—are so stereotyped that really new and fresh treatment of a theme is unwelcome. Sturgeon is

[*turn page*]

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brilliant at his best, but he was unable to sell HC to any but a science fiction magazine, and then only when he had added numerous rather silly and meaningless gimmicks.

Bob Hoskins, Box 158, Lyon Falls, New York

Sorry your letter had to be somewhat abridged, but the part that we omitted went to those more important readers to whom it was directed. . . . A decade ago, any time a new name appeared on the contents page, everyone knew at once that the author was really Henry Kuttner. Now, every newcomer is suspected of being false whiskers concealing the countenance of Randall Garrett, or Robert Silverberg, or the two together. Sorry to disillusion you, but Richard Royale is neither Garret nor Silverberg, nor both; John Danelaw is neither Garret nor Silverberg, nor both; and Michael Sherman is the not-too-heavily disguise of a party who'd appeared in print before both members of the Garrett-Silverberg team were manufactured. (I said "both", not "either".) I myself have no objections to telling all, in relation to pen-names, but do so only with the author's written consent.

Sometimes there is a very good—and entirely legal and honest—reason why a person does not want his correct identity under his own name, and/or does not want his correct identity revealed. Whether this is true in the instances of Royale, Danelaw, and Sherman I couldn't say—but I haven't the okay from them on an expose.

If you'd like to see

The Reckoning

restored, then don't forget to write — or use the coupon on page 130

SEEING IS NO LIGHT MATTER

Dear RAWL:

As long as scientific phenomena have entered your magazine through the letter column, I decided to put in my two-bit theory also.

And that is:

You will not travel through time if you exceed the speed of light, because light is considered the sight of a given object and not the object itself. If a star undergoes a

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nova and is suddenly snuffed out and that star is—say, 8 light-years from Earth, we'll not see the nova until 8 years after it actually happens. Couldn't this also be reversed so as to say: If you exceed the speed of light, you'll leave light behind you; therefore, if Earth were to suddenly be snuffed out by some cosmic catastrophe and we were traveling *away* from it beyond the speed of light, we would still *see* Earth but it would not be t h e r e; and if somehow we could reach out a gigantic hand to touch the Earth, the hand would pass through the light as t h o u g h it went through a stage of dematerialization. Again, if we left Earth at beyond the speed of light and reached the same gigantic hand back toward the Earth the hand would pass through, as I say. The real Earth, that had meanwhile rotated on its axis, would not be seen for quite some time yet, and *when* seen would not actually be where it was seen, thus solving the riddle of invisibility! What I want to know is: Would the faster-than-light spaceship also be invisible?

Now for an analysis of the September issue.

A much better-than-average Emsh painting decorates the cover, and is remarkably coincident with the story, comic book & all. The white

[*turn page*]

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background looked rather good this time.

As for "Genius Loci" by Scortia, I'm forced to take the opposite stand of Chester Milbourn— Scortia writes exceedingly well, but his plots are just not worked well enough. His writing is the sole factor which causes his tales to be published, in my opinion. This "novel" in the September issue was built up, built up, and built up by Scortia until a few pages before the end you expected a thundering climax. Instead, he abruptly stopped without giving the story a suitable ending or any sort of a decent explanation. Maybe I can't be satisfied with *too*-fantastic solutions like a living being on a world composed entirely of the water there, but Scortia's ending was too utterly far-fetched. Mainly because of the obvious indecision at the ending. Truthfully, I don't think Scortia had any sort of ending in mind when he started the story and threw this unbelievable idea in at the last moment in order to complete the story.

Russ Winterbotham's "Return from Troy" was of course a far from accurate picture of what the 100th Century will probably be like when comparing civilization of 8000 years in the past with the present. I suppose, though, the sole object of the story was to get laughs. Which, incidentally were very few and far-between.

Knox's "His Head in the Clouds" was one story I kind of liked. I suppose the ending brought over the effect.

In "Compulsions", Peter Stom spent a little too much time on detail with such a very brief sort of plot. Maybe half as long it wouldn't have been so dull.

I agree with you, in the editorial, that science fiction can never be accepted as true classic literature because of its exclusive type of material. The trouble is, science fiction is believed by the unlearned to be a fiction based upon science...the science of today; therefore; they consider any stf story that is based upon a completely different science of the future or of course no science at all as utter nonsense. Then if a book is written on the basis of present-day science with a fictional plot and cast of characters, it's not considered as *real* science fiction. (i.e.) Philip Wylie's "The Smuggled Atom Bomb", or the current television series, Science Fiction Theater.

As for "The Principle", I believe it would have made a better article than a piece of fiction because of its complete absence of plot

"Just Rub a Lamp"...was too short a story to really comment on and there actually wasn't much to it.

With hopes of either a

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monthly schedule, or a reversion to 144 pages once more.

A Tennesseean, 4301 Shawnee Circle, Chattanooga 11, Tenn.

My apologies, Tennessean, for using this by-line on your letter; it's just one of those things—I lost your name. No fault of yours; you had it where it should have been, both typed and handwritten if I remember aright, and I know the name, too. But it's all gone temporarily, and your letter was too interesting to discard. Fo'give me, suh, and do write again.

WAGER ACCEPTED

Dear RAWL:

Blessings.

Since you permit "Cynical Reader" to accept replies via your office, please transmit the following offer:

Dear Cynical Reader;

Your bet is hereby accepted. I bet you that one or more great novels will appear in the science-fiction field (with or without your personal participation) in the year 1958, provided only & to wit that it be specified to our mutual agreement:

Item: what tender we are betting, whether dollars, dimes, square cash or chocolate cookies. I bake a real tender chocolate snap, with bits & nuts.

Item: what criteria shall be taken to indicate greatness, and no fair to collect in 1959, prompt and sharp.

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[*turn page*]

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enough to know and dumb enough to try.

This is a firm offer. I will even bet old copies.

Sincerely, Alma Hill

P.S. to RAWL again.

And to you, neighbor, may I add that, strictly in confidence, if anybody should realize how unsettleable is this question, they won't get in there and argue it, missing all that fun which would be piteous indeed?

We must be on the verge of something tremendous, because I feel as if all has been discovered and exploited; and what can be as amazing as what has gone on during the first half of this century. Historically, this feeling has always been a tremendous boner; reasoning hence inversely etcetera, wouldn't you agree?

But as to what constitutes literary greatness, I go by my own opinions and have seen more in this field than any other generation. So maybe it's run dry or will run dry. What is, is; what will be, will be.

As for Cynical Reader and the non-use of his name, I'm willing to respect his wishes, but it sounds like the voice of Isaac. I say this because he takes that deprecatory attitude all the time. Yet, to my notions, Asimov is the greatest of them all. If you take for criteria humanity, perceptiveness, style, informed intelligence, creativeness, scope, range, and general cussedness, who comes anywhere near his total of points?

But what the dickens. Science fiction is crazy the same as any art form, and the only thing crazier is trying to reduce it to a system.

Now about Hibbert's Law of the Natural Perversity of Inanimate Things, I liked the derived rules, but Hibbert is not entitled to credit for discovering this principle. The whole thing is well and kindly known as Murphy's Law: ("If anything can go wrong, it will.") A more useful assumption, and a more workable explanation for laboratory use in general can hardly be found around. Obviously, the statement has much better style in its simplicity than Hibbert's formulation. We should be careful about these important things.

You may be interested in a little research of my own, worked out all in my head without the use of scratch paper. I call it: *"Generalizations Derived From Murphy's Law As Applied To Educational Techniques."*

"Murphy's Law states concisely that if anything can go wrong, it will. This very useful assumption is ordinarily applied only to the evaluation of procedures and results in the experimental laboratory.

This is referred to as the

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Principle of the Perversity of Inanimate Matter. It's proof is entirely simple, because there never exists evidence of things that never happened, which is to say might have gone wrong and did not; whereas if something could have gone wrong and did, it p r o v i d e s evidence which turns up either immediately or later.

Whether true or not, this principle makes a wonderfully useful assumption, whereas tombstones are paved with people who assumed the contrary.

However, it must be observed that this principle applies only to *inanimate* objects. Once matter becomes animate, it tends to perpetuate itself, or, as the saying goes, go right. This appears to cancel out the workings of Murphy's Law; actually, the matter remains as before, but can be restated with the new factor added, as follows: 'If anything can go wrong, it will, until it is noticed and amended by someone with enough intelligence.

Thus the statement of this law is a simple description of the behavior of the physical universe; but the usefulness of this law is in the behavior of the animate u n i v e r s e, which seeks to make things go right, preferably before they happen. In other words, the function of intelligence is to make all the luck to be good, whereas the final end of undirected matter is for all the luck to be bad. n.b. When luck is predictably all good or all bad, it is not luck, but certainty. Now the application of all this to the field of Education in America will be clear as soon as one remembers that young people are only partially developed as to intelligence. Thus it follows that where school kids are concerned, if anything can go wrong, it will until it is noticed and amended, except that a certain proportion of this will not be noticed by the kids at all; a further proportion will not be noticed in time to be amended; but the remainder will behave accord-

[*turn page*]

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ing to the original formulation. A simple example would be set up by calculating the MA, corrected for grade, course of study, and how tough is the Prinliple. From this can be predicted for any given year the number and kind of killings, amputations, and so forth, to a high degree of accuracy.

Meanwhile, of course, the teachers are a further factor. They are set to have all the luck be good, which is to say, no luck at all. Meanwhile, the kids know no better that teachers get to know kids, thus introducing Finagle's Constant.

The end result of this is that the teachers figure on a basis of the pure Law, that is to say, leave nothing to chance, otherwise the result will be evil with the kids giving the evil an assist.

Naturally, this means that nothing new must ever, ever, ever or forever be tried, because what is new is unknown and what is unknown might be able to go wrong, and if it could, it would.

This leads us to a peculiar conclusion, in that education purposes to transmit knowledge, which is new at least to the recipient; yet, on the other hand, the educator is committed by tradition and professional ethics to bringing the kids through alive without the mortal dangers of confronting anything new.

In a later paper it may be possible to provide a set of tables showing how the Perversity of Matter, the Obstinacy of Educators, and the Versatility of Kids can be predicted in populations from infinity down to a million, but the first time I tried, I sprained my slipstick.

Alma Hill, 14 pt. Pleasant Street, Fort Kent, Maine

A true copy of your note has been made for "Cynical Reader", who is not Dr. Isaac Asimov; it was good to leave out.

Your searching analysis of Murphy's law leaves me dazzled, to say the least. Is this not proof enough that great discoveries and applications are still to be made?

UP HILL

Dear R.A.W.L.:

The proof-reading situation of your publications has markedly improved in the last two or three issues. No doubt you've been cracking the whip.

Besides the blunders by authors which I have spoken of in previous letters, there is another incongruous situation which has long puzzled me. In practically every story of atomic doom, there is always left an area or a pit with a weird green or blue

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glow, especially visible along the horizon at night.

Now what is this mysterious glow? Radioactives do not glow in the dark. Every newspaper you pick up tells you that that is one of the most insidious facts of atomic contamination, that the human organism is blind to radioactivity, it has no sense organ which detects it. Has anyone sighted a mysterious glow coming from Alamogordo, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Bikini, Eniwetok, or Nevada? Where do the authors get the notion that there will be any visible glow?

Perhaps they have been misled by radium dials on clocks and other instruments, although that seems a mighty meager manifestation to base a description of atomic wasteland on. Anyway, it is not the radium in these which glows; it is mixed with a fluor, which is activated by alpha bombardment from the radium, causing the fluor to give off a faint light which is visible in darkness. Some dials also have a phosphor present, which absorbs visible light during periods of illumination, and gives it off again for a time during darkness. This is the reason that the brightness of some watch and clock dials diminishes during the night.

There is a considerable in-

A. BERTRAM CHANDLER • ROBERT SILVERBERG • CAROL EMSHWILLER • MARGARET ST. CLAIR • CALVIN M. KNOX • HARLAN ELLISON • BRYCE WALTON • JIM HARMON

Are these names familiar? They ought to be; they're all well-known to lovers of fantasy and science fiction. And these authors can also be found in the pages of our detective magazines, too! That's because it takes something of the same type of skill and imagination to write logical mystery fiction that is needed for good science fiction.

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dustry of detectors for radiation, which has grown up just for the reason that the human cannot see it. These detectors operate by a variety of principles, and are available for any intensity of radioactivity. Some of them operate very like a clock dial; they have fluorescent material shielded from visible light, with an eyehole. When the fluor is struck by ionizing radiation it lights up. But radioactivity, and radioactive materials, have no visible light of their own.

Dr. Raymond Wallace, 110 Llewellyn Road, Montclair, N. J.

I know it isn't healthy to disagree with doctors, but it does look as if either you or the *Encyclopedia Britannica* is off the beam. According to the latter, really concentrated radioactivity *does* show visible light. Pure radium salts, for instance, are easily visible in the dark. So it would seem that if the residual radioactivity in a bomb pit were high enough, the pit would glow in the dark.

I couldn't resist including your note about improvement in proofreading, even though th's may result in a slump in that department. RAWL

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I have completed quiz on other side. Please send FREE Moon-Tour Reservation. Also rush 3 books checked below, as my gift books and first selection. Bill me only $1 (plus shipping charge), and enroll me as a member. Every month send the Club's free bulletin, so that I may decide whether I wish to receive the coming selection. For each book I accept, I will pay only $1 plus shipping. I need take only 4 books during each year I am a member—and I may resign at any time after accepting 4 selections.

GUARANTEE: If not delighted, I may return all books in 7 days, pay nothing, and this membership will be cancelled.

- ☐ Astounding S-F Anthology
- ☐ Best from Fantasy and S-F
- ☐ Dragon in the Sea
- ☐ Omnibus of Science-Fiction
- ☐ Report on UFO's
- ☐ Treasury of S-F Classics

Name_____ (PLEASE PRINT)

Address_____

City_____ Zone____ State_____

Selection price in Canada $1.10 plus shipping. Address Science-Fiction Club, 105 Bond Street, Toronto 2. (Offer good only in U. S. and Canada)

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Take This Lunar Quiz and WIN A ROUND-TRIP RESERVATION TO THE MOON FREE!

This authentic certificate is a Bonafide Reservation for one of the first commercial flights to the Moon

YES, a passing grade on this Lunar Quiz will bring you — ABSOLUTELY FREE — a genuine round-trip Reservation which certifies that you are among the VERY FIRST to apply for passage to the Moon! Although it in no way commits you to make the voyage, it signifies that your name is filed in Science-Fiction Book Club archives to be turned over to the first commercial company making trips to the Moon.

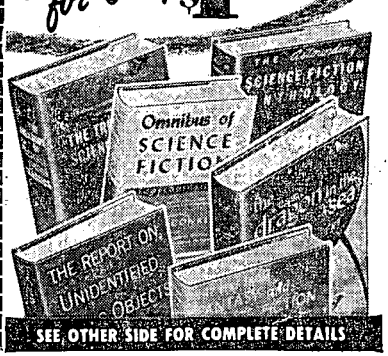
Your reservation includes many amazing facts: your actual weight on the Moon, a Rocket Ship Schedule, etc. To get your wallet-size Moon Tour Reservation right away, take the Quiz below. Then choose ANY 3 of the exciting books described on the other side—for only $1 with membership in the Science-Fiction Book Club. Mail coupon at once!

Any 3

OF THESE COMPLETE NEW MASTERPIECES OF

SCIENCE-FICTION

Yours for Only $1.00 WITH MEMBERSHIP



SEE OTHER SIDE FOR COMPLETE DETAILS

CAN YOU PASS THIS LUNAR QUIZ?

How much do you know about the Moon? Circle the answers you think are correct, fill out reverse side, and mail today for your Genuine Moon-Tour Reservation Certificate.

1. Diameter of the Moon is: smaller — greater — the same as Earth's.
2. Since its gravity is weaker than Earth's, on the Moon you would weigh: more — less than on Earth.
3. The Moon is really a: star — satellite — planet.
4. Distance to the Moon is about: 93,000,000 miles — 238,000 miles — 9,000 miles.
5. Scientists have proved that human life does — does not exist on the Moon.
6. Surface of the Moon is rough — smooth — covered with water.

IMPORTANT: This application will NOT be honored unless filled out and signed on the reverse side.

SEE OTHER SIDE OF COUPON FOR UP TO $11.95 WORTH OF SCIENCE-FICTION BEST SELLERS FOR ONLY $1.00!

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